

Business or Politics

Analysis of Businesses Supporting the Black Lives Matter Movement

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Background

Black Lives Matter is a global organization with more than 40 chapters. The black-centered political movement was founded by three women: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opel Tometi. The three women tweeted #BlackLivesMatter on July 13th, 2013; thus, the organization was born. Their actions were in response to the acquittal of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman ("Herstory," 2019). Since the organization began, it has been a voice representing the black community in politics and has educated others about white supremacy and the systemic oppression of black people to create allies. The organization's mission is:

To eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives ("About BLM," 2020).

In the second half of 2020, the Black Lives Matter website received more traffic than ever before, globally increasing its reach by 3,370%. The year 2020 makes up a quarter of its total online presence. On June 2nd, 2020, a record high of 1.9 million visitors clicked on their website and becoming its most active day in history ("2020 Impact Report," 2021). This spike in website activity was not coincidental. A tragedy occurred on Monday, May 25th, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Law enforcement were called on a 46-year-old black man, George Floyd, for allegedly using a counterfeit 20-dollar bill to buy cigarettes. Officers Thomas Lane and Alex Kueng responded to the call. After Floyd was in police custody, two more officers arrived at the scene, Derek Chauvin and Tou Thao. Chauvin has 17 complaints reported against him in his personnel file, while Thao has six complaints and one brutality lawsuit from 2017. A commotion

started, and bystanders began recording the incident on video. Chauvin is seen dragging the suspect out of the police car until he was lying face down on the pavement while still handcuffed. He then proceeded to kneel on Floyd's neck to "restrain him." Bystanders begged the officer to get off the man, repeatedly crying out, "I can't breathe." The other three officers in the video were shown blocking off some of the crowd and essentially just watching Chauvin take Floyd's life. After 8 minutes and 46 seconds, Floyd's cries were silenced, and he was later pronounced dead.

The next day, all four officers were fired after an uproar from the public. Chauvin was arrested 4 days after the incident and was charged with third-degree murder. The public was outraged by these charges after videos of the incident went viral. The charges were later changed to second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree "depraved mind" murder, and second-degree manslaughter. The other three officers on the scene were charged with aiding and abetting murder (Hill et al., 2020). Worldwide protests and riots happened for months after the event. The balance of this paper will evaluate the NFL's hypocrisy of its treatment towards the black community, then compare Nike's proactive strategy to Under Armour's reactive strategy regarding social justice and racial equality.

National Football League

The NFL was founded in 1920, with little to no representation of the black community in the sport. Now, almost 75% of players disclose their race as people of color. Still, only 13% of head coaches identify as people of color, and representation decreases the farther up the chain of leadership. Jason Wright was the very first black team president as of the year 2020 (Brassil &Lutz, 2020). These statistics are disproportional for a league that owes a considerable amount of its success to the black community.

In 2016, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick decided to use his platform to take a stance against police brutality in the United States. It began with him sitting during the national anthem during preseason games. After the game, Kaepernick gave NFL Media an exclusive interview explaining his actions:

I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football, and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder (Wyche, 2016).

This statement caused a public outcry. It also caught the attention of former Army Green Beret Nate Boyer. He noticed the change Kaepernick was trying to make and decided to give him some advice. Boyer explained why Kaepernick should take a knee during the national anthem instead. Soldiers take a knee in front of their fallen brother's grave to show respect. Since this movement is about justice for the black community's fallen members and not about disrespecting the men that have fought for our freedom, Kaepernick agreed and then let the public know, "Once again, I'm not anti-American. I love America. I love people. That's why I'm doing this. I want to help make America better. I think having these conversations helps everybody have a better understanding of where everybody is coming from" (Witz, 2016).

Colin Kaepernick became the most praised and the most hated player in the league at the same time. People of color were constantly thanking him for being their voice. While the San Francisco Police Union sent a letter to the 49ers claiming it will not stand by and be attacked (Person, 2016). Even the President of the United States, Donald Trump, spoke out about the peaceful protest at one of his rallies in Huntsville, Alabama, "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when someone disrespects our flag to say, get that son of a b**** off the

field right now... Out! He's fired. he's fired" (Cancian, 2020). Kaepernick's peaceful protest gained much attention from the public. Official statements were released in response to the backlash received. The NFL's stated, "Players are encouraged but not required to stand during the playing of the national anthem" (Wyche, 2016). CEO's and the player's team also released statements:

1. CEO of NFL, Roger Goodell – *I don't necessarily agree with what he's doing. I support our players when they want to see a change in society, and we don't live in a perfect society. On the other hand, we believe very strongly in patriotism in the NFL; I personally believe very strongly in that* (Macur, 2016).
2. San Francisco 49ers – *The national anthem is and always will be a special part of the pre-game ceremony. It is an opportunity to honor our country and reflect on the great liberties we are afforded as its citizens. In respecting such American principles as freedom of religion and freedom of expression, we recognize the right of an individual to choose and participate, or not, in our celebration of the national anthem* (Wyche, 2016).
3. Owner of the 49ers, Jed York – *Today, I am committing that the 49ers Foundation will contribute \$1 Million to the cause of improving racial and economic inequality and fostering communication and collaboration between law enforcement and the communities they serve here in the Bay Area* (Kawakami, 2016).

The 49ers franchise seemed to fully support Kaepernick's peaceful protest. However, the NFL's statement on the issue, and even more so, the CEO of the NFL implied a lack of support. On March 3rd, 2017, Kaepernick decided to opt out of his 49ers contract to sign as a free agent and has not played in the NFL since then ("Republic World," 2020). How the league managed

the Colin Kaepernick controversy directly contradicts the responsibility the league claims to owe to society and its players:

Every member of the NFL community embraces our unique leadership role in society, and assumes the trust, character, and responsibility that comes with that role. We bring fans and communities from all walks of life together to celebrate a game that is constantly evolving, balancing the authenticity of tradition with the power of innovation (“NFL,” 2019).

Later in 2017, the Player’s Coalition was founded by two NFL players Anquan Boldin and Malcolm Jenkins. The organization believes in equity and justice. Their goal is to achieve social and racial equality, so the opportunity for Black Americans to thrive is available in the future. The Player’s Coalition’s mission statement, “Our Mission is to achieve social and racial equality using Players Coalition influence and support to impact systemic social and civic change in the areas of Police & Community Relations, Criminal Justice Reform, Education, and Economic Advancement in low-income communities” (“Players Coalition,” n.d.).

The NFL eventually partnered with the organization to create its first “Inspire Change” campaign, released in March 2020. This advertisement includes founder Anquan Boldin sharing the story of his younger cousin Corey having car troubles at night, then becoming a victim of police brutality by an off-duty cop (YouTube, 2020). The NFL finally fully supported the peaceful protest Kaepernick began and other players continued, but still did not support him. The partnership with the Players Coalition shows active contribution towards the league’s core values: Respect – Everyone matters. Everyone contributes; Integrity – We always look to make the right call; Responsibility to Team – As a team, we support one another. We depend on one

another; Resiliency – We set high standards and continuously strive for excellence (“NFL,” 2019).

Approximately two months after the NFL and Player’s Coalition campaign, George Floyd was murdered. Roger Goodell, CEO of the NFL, was a guest on Emmanuel Acho’s YouTube series “Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man” amidst the public outrage of the event in Minneapolis. Acho wondered what Goodell would say to Kaepernick for his and the league’s response to the protest that began in 2016. Goodell responded with regret for not listening earlier and even encouraged teams to sign the free-agent quarterback (Gatto, 2020). The NFL also released a statement in response to the murder of George Floyd on May 30th, 2020:

The NFL family is greatly saddened by the tragic events across our country. The protesters' reactions to these incidents reflect the pain, anger and frustration that so many of us feel. Our deepest condolences go out to the family of Mr. George Floyd and to those who have lost loved ones, including the families of Ms. Breonna Taylor in Louisville, and Mr. Ahmaud Arbery, the cousin of Tracy Walker of the Detroit Lions. As current events dramatically underscore, there remains much more to do as a country and as a league. These tragedies inform the NFL's commitment and our ongoing efforts. There remains an urgent need for action. We recognize the power of our platform in communities and as part of the fabric of American society. We embrace that responsibility and are committed to continuing the important work to address these systemic issues together with our players, clubs and partners (“NFL,” 2020).

Another “Inspire Change” campaign from the NFL was launched during the 2021 Superbowl. The advertisement is a montage with players of different races and teams coming together, kneeling, holding up black power symbols, and honoring police brutality victims. Clips

from Black Lives Matter protests were included as well, while LaDainian Tomlinson's Pro Football Hall of Fame induction speech from 2017 was heard. The league then announced their commitment of \$250 million to help end systemic racism because while the season is over, their fight for social justice is not. ("NFL," 2021). This advertisement and donation support the league's mission statement, "We are all stewards of football. We unite people and inspire communities in the joy of the game by delivering the world's most exciting sports and entertainment experience" ("NFL," 2019).

Although the league is finally supporting players it's profiting from and instituting real change for social justice; backlash was still received from the public for this advertisement. Public figures such as singer Mariah Carey and Ana DuVernay, the creator of the award-winning film "13th" explaining systemic racism, tweeted their appreciation of Colin Kaepernick. Sports journalist Jemele Hill also pointed out contradictions of the NFL on Twitter, "In that Inspire Change commercial, the NFL forgot to show the part where they blackballed Colin Kaepernick, have only 3 black NFL head coaches and no majority black ownership" (Germain, 2021).

In conclusion, the NFL's actions have often contradicted their claims regarding social justice and racial equality. Three undeniable examples of this include; first, Goodell admitting to disagreeing with Kaepernick's stance on police brutality but then allowing the NFL to partner with the Player's Coalition to raise awareness for the same issue. Second, Colin Kaepernick has not been signed since he began the peaceful protest, but other players continued the protest yet kept their jobs. And third, the NFL declined a Veteran's commercial for the 2018 Superbowl saying to "Please Stand" because it was too political, but then allowed Jeep's 2021 Superbowl commercial convincing citizens to "Meet in the Middle" while referencing both political parties (Bieler, 2019; WP Company, 2021). The NFL finally began backing up their claims of support

through the \$250 million donations over ten years. However, the damage from their hypocrisy over the years had already caused the league to lose many fans on either side of the controversy.

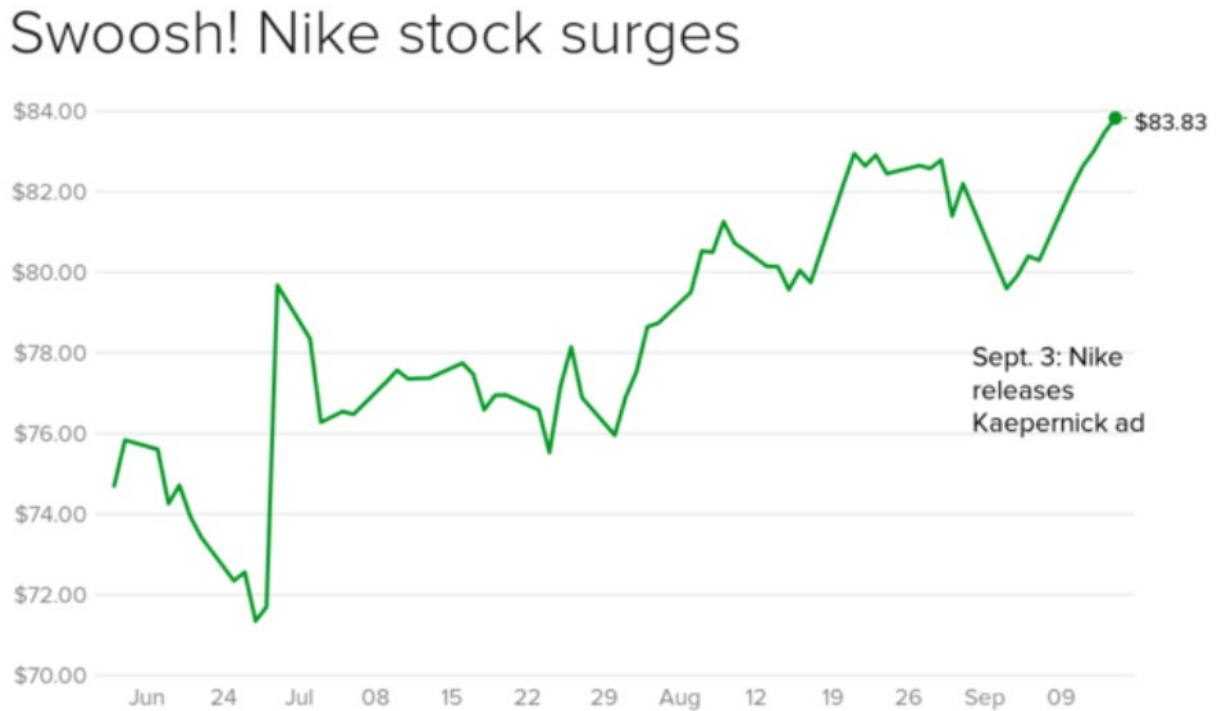
Nike

A year and a half after Colin Kaepernick left the NFL, Nike resigned their endorsement deal with the ex-quarterback. Kaepernick was chosen as the face of the campaign for the 30th anniversary of their slogan, Just Do It. The commercial title was “Dream Crazy,” and about halfway through, it shows Kaepernick as the narrator saying, “Believe in something... Even if it means sacrificing everything” (YouTube, 2018). Much of the public was outraged, and #BoycottNike began trending on Twitter. President Trump even spoke out on the topic by saying the NFL will be hard to watch until all the players stand for the flag. Nike founder Phil Knight responded:

It doesn't matter how many people hate your brand as long as enough people love it, and as long as you have that attitude, you can't be afraid of offending people. You can't try and go down the middle of the road. You have to take a stand on something, which is ultimately I think why the Kaepernick ad worked (Bieler & Bonesteel, 2019).

Despite the public's backlash, Nike had a 31% boost in sales, a \$6 billion brand value increase, and claimed \$163 million in earned media (Beer, 2019). This iconic and groundbreaking advertisement led to immense success for the company. Which later inspired the production and release of Nike's commercial with Serena Williams titled “Dream Crazier” to empower female athletes (YouTube, 2019). These sorts of woke advertisements have shown that the company stays true to its purpose, “Our Purpose is to move the world forward through the power of sports – breaking barriers and building community to change the game for all” (“Breaking Barriers,” n.d.).

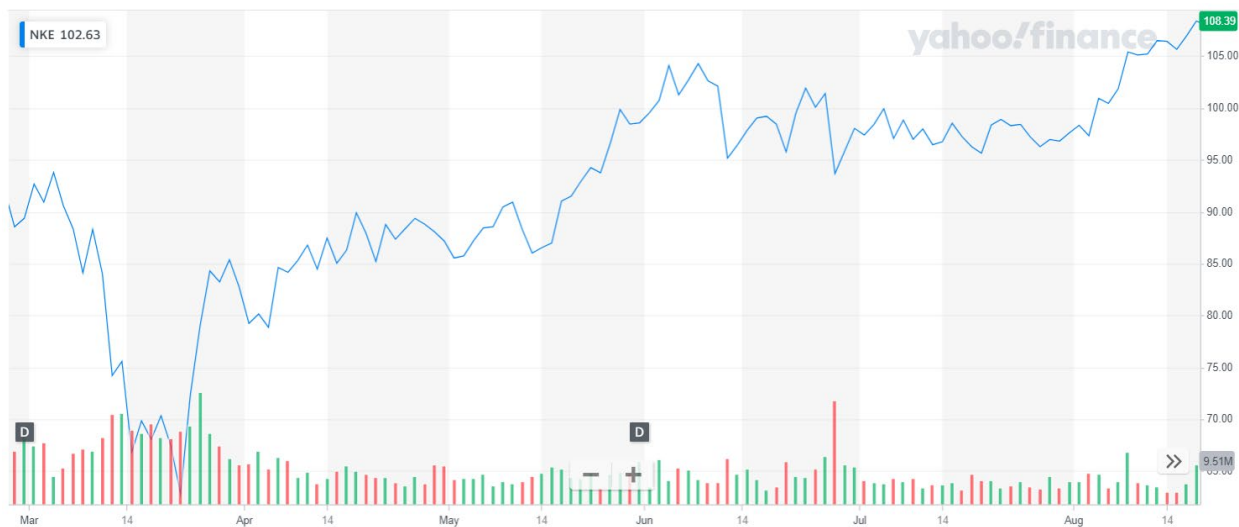
After seeing the company’s success, five months later, a special edition Kaepernick jersey was released. The #7 jersey had the 49ers’ design in an all-black color scheme. The jersey was another success for the company after selling out in less than 24 hours (Barrabi, 2019). Nike stock surges from the Colin Kaepernick “Dream Crazy” advertisement is shown below (Berr, 2018):



Four days after the murder of George Floyd, Nike released one of the most meaningful messages in response to the event. A minute-long video was produced and released with the title “For Once, Don’t Do It.” The video encouraged the public, “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 a part of the change” (“Nike Release New Film,” 2020). Less than two weeks after the tragedy, Nike announced their four-year commitment with Converse and Jordan brands. Over the next four years, the companies will be collectively investing \$40 million to

fight systemic racism. This partnership will support organizations addressing racial inequality through economic empowerment, education, and social justice (Nike, 2020). These long-term actions set an example for the kinds of corporate social responsibility every company should be practicing. Through the dream crazy and crazier campaigns, and this donation, Nike has shown to uphold and stay true to their mission statement, “To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world.*If you have a body, you are an athlete” (“Breaking Barriers,” n.d.).

In conclusion, Nike cares about social issues and takes a proactive approach. The company was rewarded in many ways by supporting Kaepernick before most companies finally did. When COVID began, Nike’s stock prices dropped, much like nearly every other company. After their quick response and action to the murder of George Floyd, their stocks rose higher than before. The company’s stock trend is shown below (Yahoo!, 2021). Nike’s “woke” marketing strategies attempt to create effective change on critical issues in our society.



Under Armour

There’s no record of Under Armour speaking out about social justice or racial equality. The founder and former CEO Kevin Plank, in a way, did the opposite. Plank held a position on

President Trump's American Manufacturing Council. The CEO also praised President Trump during an interview with CNBC in 2017:

I think he's highly passionate. To have such a pro-business president is something that is a real asset for the country. People can really grab that opportunity. He loves to build I don't think there's any surprises here. When you look at the president he wants to build things. He wants to build things he wants to make bold decisions and be really decisive. I'm a big fan of people that operate in the world of publish and iterate versus think, think, think, think, think. So there's a lot that I respect there (CNBC, 2017).

This praise occurred well after President Trump spoke publicly about his disapproval of NFL player Colin Kaepernick's peaceful protest. Under Armour stars Steph Curry, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, and Misty Copeland criticized the CEO and his comments. The stars did not feel comfortable being associated with a company whose values are so much different from their own and made it known:

- 1. The Rock – His words were divisive and lacking in perspective. Inadvertently creating a situation where the personal political opinions of UA's partners and its employees were overshadowed by the comments of its CEO. We don't partner with a brand casually. I partner with brands I trust and with people who share my same values. That means a commitment to diversity, inclusion, community, open-mindedness and some serious hard work. But it doesn't mean that I or my team will always agree with the opinion of everyone who works there, including its executives. Great leaders inspire and galvanize the masses during turbulent times, they don't cause people to divide and disband.*
- 2. Misty Copeland – I have always appreciated the great support and platform that Under Armour has given me to represent my community, gender, and career on the world stage.*

However, I strongly disagree with Kevin Plank's recent comments in support of Trump as recently reported. Those of you who have supported and followed my career know that the one topic I've never backed away from speaking openly about is the importance of diversity and inclusion.

3. Steph Curry – *I agree with that description, if you remove the 'et.' [from asset] (Reed, 2017).*

Under Armour received backlash from the public through tweets with the hashtag #BoycottUnderArmour. The company released a lengthy apology statement in response to the negativity received from both the public and their celebrity partnerships. Shortly after this incident, Plank resigned from the American Manufacturing Council. Since these incidents, Under Armour has reminded the public many times, “We engage in policy, not politics” (Boynton, 2017).

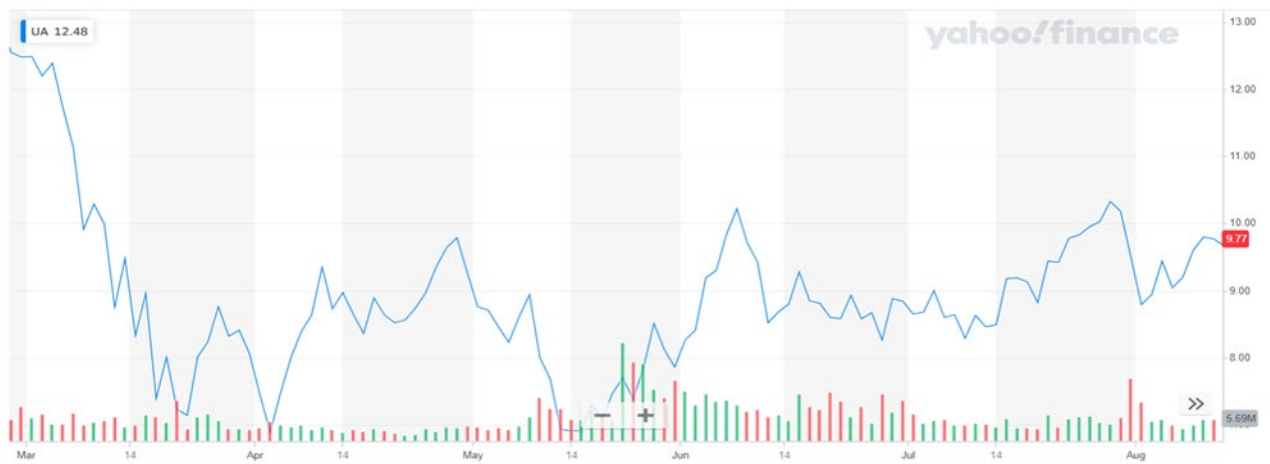
Once the uproar about the murder of George Floyd emerged, Under Armour began making changes. CEO Patrik Frisk released a statement on behalf of the company about Floyd’s death. The statement finally goes along with the company’s “Stand for Equality” value:

We stand with our Black teammates, athletes, consumers and community, both in the United States and around the globe, through our company value of Stand for Equality because Black Lives Matter... We are committed to supporting and providing resources to not only our teammates and athletes, but our consumers and communities to advance social justice, eradicate systemic racism and be part of the work towards building a better tomorrow—for everyone (“A Message From,” 2020).

Its first initiative was recognizing Juneteenth as a paid holiday for the company. Under Armour also set a new diversity initiative for hiring and promoting black workers. By 2023 at

least 12% of the director level or higher will be black talent. This goal was in addition to a commitment already in place to have 30% of those positions filled by black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) talent. Currently, Under Armour has 20% of the BIPOC goal met, and 7% is made up of black employees (Wilens, 2020).

Although Under Armour learned from its mistakes and changed its initiatives for the better, it was not enough. The company was reacting in response to issues and not advocating for them. Juneteenth would have stayed an unrecognized and unpaid holiday if riots from the public had not occurred. The 5% increase of black talent in leadership over the next three years is underwhelming. Furthermore, not pledging to donate to black communities or social justice and racial equality organizations, neither before nor after the George Floyd incident, shows where the company's priorities lay. The company's stocks went down from COVID just like every other company, but it did not rebound in the same way as Nike's (Yahoo!, 2021). Under Armour became "woke" far too late in the game and has suffered its consequences.



Black History Month Initiatives

Any reputable company has initiatives each year for black history month. It was interesting to witness the change in initiatives for nearly every company from 2020 to 2021.

After so much awareness was brought to the Black Lives Matter movement when George Floyd

was killed, companies realized their actions were not enough and made changes. Both Nike and Under Armour took part in upgrading their initiatives.

In 2020, Nike released five pairs of shoes representing African American athletes. The company partnered with Kevin Durant, Paul George, LeBron James, Kyrie Irving, and Giannis Antetokounmpo to create their signature shoe in honor of them. The shoes launched include the KD12, PG4, LEBRON 17, KYRIE 6, and Zoom Freak 1. Each shoe was designed from the inspiration of early 90's street fashion and African textiles ("Nike Basketball BHM" 2020). It is uncertain if profits from these shoes went towards black communities or social justice and racial equality organizations. In 2021, Nike took a completely different approach from their previous black history month initiatives. The company's focus was not on material items anymore. Instead, it helped create real change for the black community by empowering, listening, and supporting them while also leveling the playing field. Here's what the company had to say:

Since 2005, Nike's BHM product has created opportunities for Nike to connect, celebrate and give back to the Black community. In 2021, Nike will strengthen the focus of Black History Month through investing in the community and creating platforms for athletes to raise their voices. 2021 is not about product. It's about advocacy and action, listening to Black athletes and using the platform sport creates to drive meaningful change...

Leveraging the power of sport as a unifying force, Nike is helping kids reach their greatest potential by creating an equal playing field through community investment. For Black History Month, Nike is recognizing 20 U.S.-based nonprofits that offer play and sport programs, and support education and career development, with a total of \$500,000 in grants ("Black History Month," 2021).

In 2020, Under Armour released the Curry 7 Colorway shoe for their black history month initiative. Stephen Curry helped design this shoe in honor of African American architect David Adjaye. The inspiration behind it arose during the player's recent trip to the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. While Curry and several of his teammates accompanied local youth to this museum, he was exposed to Adjaye's work and was awed by it. It is uncertain if profits from this \$140 shoe went towards black communities or social justice and racial equality organizations ("Our History," 2020). In 2021, Under Armour upgraded its initiatives from previous years. A three-minute video was produced titled "To Baltimore with Love." A whole collection of clothes was also released called DVNLLN. This collection includes six shirts, a hoodie, and four shoes. DVNLLN and the Baltimore love letter were created with and inspired by their own UA photographer, Devin Allen. Here is what Allen had to say about these projects and his hometown, "We want to tell stories of unsung heroes. This Black History Month collection might seem like it's all about sports, or Baltimore—but it's more than that. It's the resilience I see in my city. This is about celebrating my city and giving back" ("United We Win," 2021). It is uncertain whether the DVNLLN collection's profit went towards black communities or social justice and racial equality organizations.

The initiatives from 2020 to 2021, for each company, honors the black community in a way it never had before. For these two companies, only time will tell whether these changes were genuine or in response to the publics' Black Lives Matter protests.

Political Donations

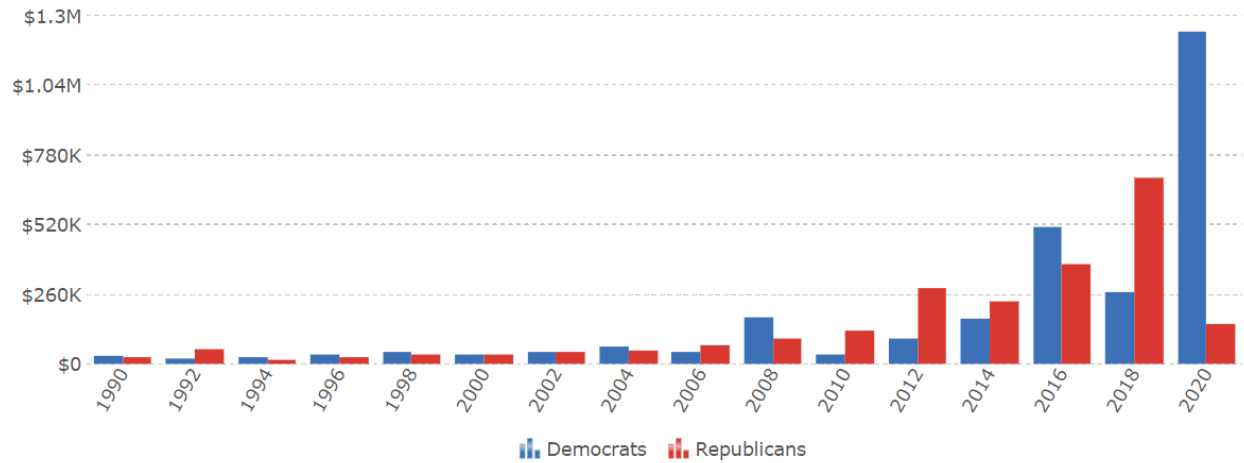
Some companies choose to handle business and politics as separate entities. Both Nike and Under Armour have chosen to combine politics in their business practices. Since both

companies began donating to political parties, each has given much more to the Democratic party overall.

What is interesting about Nike is that since 2000, the company has donated significantly more to the Democratic party during the presidential election years, except for 2012. However, in non-presidential election years since 2000, the company has donated more to the Republican party, except for 2002, by less than \$800 (“Nike Inc Profile,” n.d.). The current CEO of Nike, John Donahoe, personally donated to Joe Biden’s campaign in 2020 (Ngo & Ballhaus, 2020). This donation to the Democratic candidate comes as no surprise after President Trump has spoken out about Nike on multiple occasions regarding their actions to support the Black Lives Matter movement.

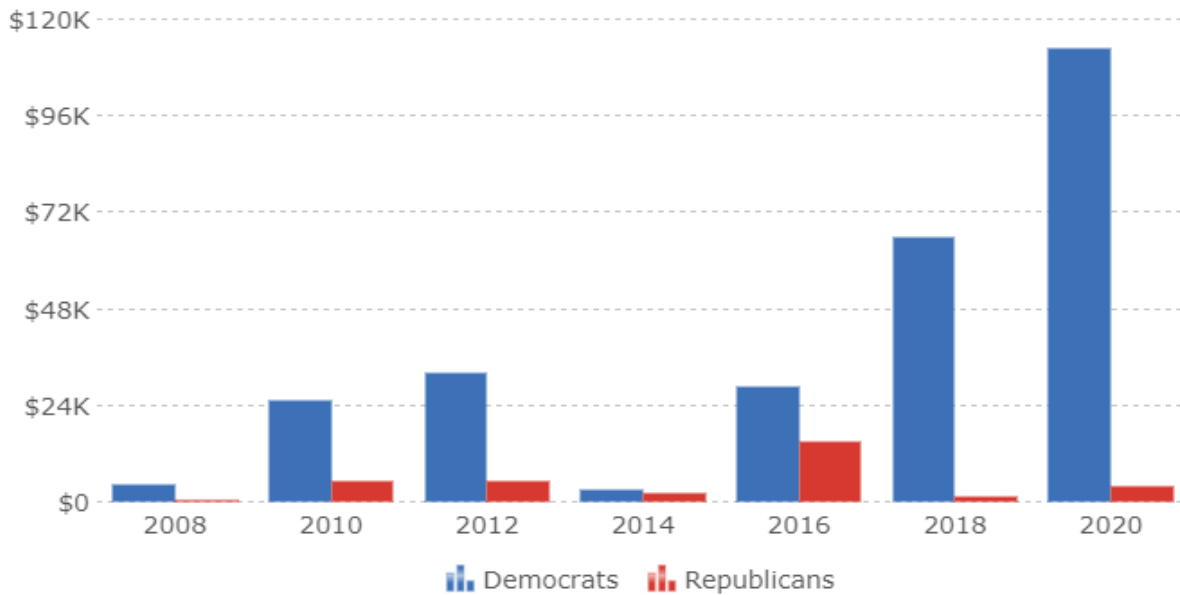
What is interesting about Under Armour is that the company has donated significantly more to the Democratic party since 2008, except for 2014 when the difference was only \$800 (“Under Armour Profile,” n.d.). It is interesting because until late 2019, Under Armour founder and CEO Kevin Plank was on President Trump’s American Manufacturing Council. Plank had also endorsed or spoken highly of President Trump during interviews. The new Under Armour CEO, Patrik Frisk, has no record of personally supporting a candidate in the 2020 election. Most likely because Frisk is an immigrant from Sweden, and it was his first time voting as an American citizen.

Records of Nike’s political donations as a company for the last eight presidential elections are summarized below (“Nike Inc Profile,” n.d.):



Cycle	Total	Democrats	% to Dems	Republicans	% to Repubs
2020	\$1,645,461	\$1,204,599	88.86%	\$151,019	11.14%
2018	\$960,218	\$267,315	27.87%	\$691,892	72.13%
2016	\$895,070	\$508,271	57.67%	\$373,092	42.33%
2014	\$399,963	\$168,067	42.13%	\$230,876	57.87%
2012	\$404,192	\$93,457	24.92%	\$281,550	75.08%
2010	\$159,574	\$36,449	22.92%	\$122,600	77.08%
2008	\$272,726	\$174,665	64.90%	\$94,461	35.10%
2006	\$113,255	\$43,855	38.72%	\$69,400	61.28%
2004	\$115,861	\$64,861	55.98%	\$51,000	44.02%
2002	\$86,750	\$43,750	50.43%	\$43,000	49.57%
2000	\$69,759	\$34,450	49.38%	\$35,309	50.62%
1998	\$77,000	\$44,000	57.14%	\$33,000	42.86%
1996	\$59,674	\$34,924	58.52%	\$24,750	41.48%
1994	\$36,325	\$23,075	63.52%	\$13,250	36.48%
1992	\$75,099	\$20,230	26.94%	\$54,869	73.06%

Records of Under Armour’s political donations as a company for the last four presidential elections are summarized below (“Under Armour Profile,” n.d.):



Contributions by Party of Recipient i

Cycle	Total	Democrats	% to Dems	Republicans	% to Repubs
2020	\$121,196	\$112,699	96.56%	\$4,016	3.44%
2018	\$66,966	\$65,816	98.40%	\$1,070	1.60%
2016	\$43,288	\$28,481	65.79%	\$14,807	34.21%
2014	\$4,800	\$2,800	58.33%	\$2,000	41.67%
2012	\$37,300	\$31,800	85.83%	\$5,250	14.17%
2010	\$30,025	\$25,000	83.26%	\$5,025	16.74%
2008	\$4,962	\$4,462	89.92%	\$500	10.08%

Closing Statement

A conclusion can be drawn after researching the Black Lives Matter Movement, analyzing the NFL, and comparing two similar companies with different strategies. The NFL's responses and claims regarding social justice or racial equality issues suggest hypocrisy in the league's treatment towards the black community. Actions or initiatives that contradict an organization's claims result in public backlash. Nike's proactive strategy had significant success compared to Under Armour's reactive strategy regarding social justice and racial equality. Nike reaped the benefits of its woke, proactive, and advocacy approach for its marketing efforts and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Under Armour's reactive or responsive approach reflects poorly on the company's value of "Stand for Equality." Companies with progressive ideas, politically correct practices, and that speak out on social issues will be rewarded in the end.

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