

Facebook diversity report: Efforts still failing Black and Hispanic employees, especially women

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After years of pledges to close the racial gap, Facebook is still struggling to hire, promote and retain Black employees at a critical moment in

corporate America's reckoning with systemic inequities.

From 2013 to 2018, the company failed to meaningfully increase the number of employees from underrepresented groups in its U.S. workforce, a USA TODAY analysis shows.

As its U.S. employee base grew more than sixfold to 27,705, Facebook's ranks grew by fewer than 1,000 Black people, according to the EEO-1 reports the company files each year with the federal government. Black employees' share of the company's workforce during that period of rapid expansion rose to 3.7% from 1%.

They did not fare better in the C-suite. In 2013, Facebook had zero Black executives. In 2018, the most recent data available, it had 32, 3% of all executives. In that same time frame, the number of Facebook executives increased more than sixfold, according to the 2018 EEO-1 report, the most recent data available during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Facebook has missed out on a wealth of talent among Black and Hispanic women, each of whom account for less than 1% of executives. In all, Facebook employs 485 Black women in the U.S.—1.75% of its workforce—and 714 Hispanic women—less than 2.6% of its workforce.

Maxine Williams, Facebook's chief diversity officer, told USA TODAY that Facebook is slowly addressing disparities.

Nearly 4% of the company's current workforce is Black and 6.3% is Hispanic, according to Facebook's diversity report released Wednesday. The numbers are a slight increase from 2019, when 3.8% of the workforce was Black and 5.2% was Hispanic.

According to the report, 3.4% of senior leaders are Black, up from 3.1%, and 4.3% are Hispanic, up from 3.5%.

Since 2014, the share of Black employees in technical roles has increased only slightly to 1.7% from 1.5% and Hispanic employees to 4.3% from 3.5%.

"Since 2018, things have improved but they are nowhere near stellar," Williams said.

Civil rights audit pushes Facebook to do more, better

Released last week, a civil rights audit of Facebook hailed some of the company's diversity efforts as innovative.

"We are trying to deal with issues which are deeply embedded and persistent in society, bias inequity etc. Doing the same thing that everyone has done hasn't gotten society much further, hasn't gotten corporate America much further," Williams said.

But the audit also raised new questions about the company's lack of progress on diversity and inclusion.

Concern among underrepresented minorities inside the company remains high from their lack of representation in senior management to technical roles, according to the audit commissioned by Facebook under pressure from civil rights groups and some members of Congress.

These employees question the fairness of the performance evaluation process and want more information on attrition rates. And, in a company where their ranks are so thin, they feel isolated and without a say in how Facebook's policies and products affect their communities.

Scrutiny of hiring and retention practices in the tech world has intensified since massive protests over the death of George Floyd in police custody has brought racial justice to the forefront of the national

conversation, leading to a wave of corporate statements in support of communities of color, including from Facebook.

"For some, these expressions of solidarity ring hollow from companies whose workforce and leadership fail to reflect the diversity of this country or whose work environments feel far from welcoming or inclusive to underrepresented groups," the Facebook civil rights auditors wrote. "The civil rights community hopes that these company commitments to doing 'better' or 'more' start with actual, concrete progress to further instill principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in corporate America and Silicon Valley."

Complaints of racial discrimination

The audit's findings echo an outpouring of first-hand accounts of racial discrimination on blogs and social media, which have drawn the public's attention to the lonesome and sometimes painful experience of being Black at Facebook.

A November post from current and former Facebook employees, "Facebook Empowers Racism Against Its Employees of Color," portrayed the company culture as rife with racist and discriminatory behavior against African Americans and Hispanics. Facebook apologized, but the same group reported that, though they received some support, several managers were openly hostile and on the app Blind, Facebook employees posted racist memes. One year earlier, a former Facebook manager, Mark Luckie, accused Facebook of having a "Black people problem."

Earlier this month, a Black manager and two job applicants who were rejected by Facebook filed a complaint, alleging that the company is biased against Black people in hiring, performance evaluations, promotions and pay.

A 2017 study from the Kapur Center for Social Impact and Harris Poll found that toxic workplaces—where harassment, stereotyping and bullying occur—are driving away women and people of color. Not only does the exodus undercut tech companies' efforts to boost diversity, it's costing an estimated \$16 billion a year, the study estimated.

Williams, who now reports directly to Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's second highest ranking executive, says the behavior described by employees was "awful."

"Unfairness, inconsistency, microaggressions, all of the things that would make somebody feel like this isn't for me, and that is the last thing you want anyone to feel," she said.

Facebook has made a number of recent changes to address the issues employees raised, including improvements to its performance system, new ways to report discrimination and microaggressions and increased accountability of senior leaders, Williams said. In April, Facebook added more firepower to its diversity team when it named Sandra Altiné as vice president of workforce diversity and inclusion.

"How do you get to more fairness? How do you get to more equity? We're very focused on that," Williams said. "Building systems or forging functions where you standardize more. It's very much unsexy stuff but it's the stuff that starts to reduce the variability in people's experiences. We are still a place where people of color will come here and say, 'This is the best place I have ever worked.' And then there are many people who say, not just people of color, it isn't. How do you close that gap? I think the behavior needs to be more consistent everywhere."

The tech industry's race problem

These problems are not isolated to Facebook.

Tech's race problem was thrust into the national conversation in 2014 when companies from Google to Apple disclosed for the first time how few women and people of color they employ. The companies vowed to make their workforce less homogeneous.

The paucity of underrepresented minorities in an industry increasingly dominating the U.S. economy has drawn sharp scrutiny from company shareholders and Washington lawmakers. Yet hundreds of millions, if not billions, in diversity spending later, very little has changed.

Analyses by USA TODAY and others show major tech companies employ far fewer women and underrepresented minorities than other industries, even in Silicon Valley.

According to the most recent U.S. government data released in 2016, Black Americans make up 3% of employees in the top 75 tech firms in Silicon Valley, while they hold 24% of the jobs in non-tech firms. Black women are also represented at much higher rates in other industries consistent with their proportion of the overall U.S. workforce.

And it's not just in technical roles. Minorities at Google and other major tech companies are also sharply underrepresented in non-technical jobs such as sales and administration, with African Americans faring noticeably worse than Hispanics, a USA TODAY investigation in 2014 revealed.

Facebook signals it's serious about closing racial gap

Facebook has made recent moves to signal its seriousness in addressing the racial gap that dates back to the founding of the company.

By 2024, it pledged to have 50% of its workforce come from underrepresented communities (women or people who are Black,

Hispanic Native American or Pacific Islander or people with two or more). Currently 45.3% of its workforce comes from underrepresented communities, Facebook said, but did not provide a breakdown. As part of this goal, Facebook says it wants to double the number of Black and Hispanic employees in the U.S.

Facebook said it is also committing to increasing the representation of people of color in leadership positions in the U.S. by 30%, including a 30% increase in the representation of Black people by 2025.

In addition, two Black women, Peggy Alford and Tracey Travis, now sit on the board of directors. A third Black board member, Kenneth Chenault, stepped down after disagreements over political advertising and how Facebook moderates discourse on its platform, the Wall Street Journal reported in March.

George Floyd intensifies scrutiny

The diversity report comes at a sensitive time for Facebook. When CEO Mark Zuckerberg decided to leave up a post from Donald Trump in which the president called protesters thugs—and warned "When the looting starts, the shooting starts"—a firestorm erupted inside the company.

Internal message boards spilled over with outrage from employees, quickly reaching crisis levels, with Facebook employees staging a virtual "walkout."

A coalition of corporations and civil rights leaders quickly formed to force Facebook to publicly reckon with the role it plays in perpetuating systemic racism. Hundreds of companies, including top brands Unilever, Ford and Pfizer, pulled advertising from Facebook this month to protest the role the company plays in spreading racial hatred, white supremacy

and violent threats.

Civil rights groups trace the lack of diversity inside the company directly to how content moderation decisions are made, including racially motivated hate speech against the Black community. Complaints that the social media giant disproportionately stifles Black users' speech while failing to protect them from harassment have raged for years.

If anything, Black users say harassment has gotten worse as nationwide protests following Floyd's death draw renewed attention to historic racial inequities. Black people in private groups dedicated to discussing racial justice and police brutality report being swarmed by organized networks of white supremacists, who use racial slurs and tell them to go back to Africa.

A network of Facebook groups with more than 1 million members, created to protest coronavirus stay-at-home orders, are also targeting Black Lives Matter, using slurs to refer to Black people and protesters, the Associated Press reported last week.

The persistent lack of representation of African Americans and Hispanics in the Facebook workforce does not surprise Rashad Robinson, president of online racial justice organization Color of Change.

"Year after year when the issue has to do with race, Facebook expects us to believe they are working hard and care deeply," Robinson told USA TODAY, "even though time after time they fail to deliver."

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