

Podcast: Jonathan Wilson – brand, Black Lives Matter and representation, cancel culture and future trends

Transcript

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, important, black, racist, organization, world, black lives matter, advert, journey, thought, professor, debate, interesting, activism, backlash, culture, robots, mistake, musician, community

SPEAKERS

Hannah Mason, Jonathan Wilson, Jake Young

Jake Young 00:01

Okay, Arts Marketing Festival goers welcome. This one is a wide-ranging chat between Hannah Mason and Professor Jonathan Wilson. touching on Black Lives Matter and representation, cancel culture and debate, the right to be forgiven, the origins and hijacking of the word woke, and some predictions for the future. Jonathan is a multi-award winning academic and founding partner of Dragonfly Black. There's lots more, but I'm going to leave it there and let Jonathan tell the rest in his own words, but I will say that this isn't the first festival that Jonathan has played. That honor goes to some festival called Glastonbury. I don't know. Anyway, get to digital while he's on festival-goers this one goes deep. So let's head over to the main stage now and hear from the next headliner. Jonathan and Hannah..

Hannah Mason 00:48

Right let's go for it. Okay. Hi, Jonathan.

Jonathan Wilson 00:52

Hey, how you doing?

Hannah Mason 00:53

I'm good. Thank you. How are you?

Jonathan Wilson 00:55

Yeah, I'm good. I'm still alive in 2020. That's something

Hannah Mason 00:59

Yes, that's an achievement. I was gonna ask you to just introduce yourself briefly to the listeners.

Jonathan Wilson 01:07

Okay, so I'm a full fat professor. What I mean is I'm a professor of brand, strategy and culture. I've graduated from four different faculties science, business, humanities, arts, I've got two doctorates. I've written about 200 pieces of work, spoken at about 100 conferences around the world. And I started my career in London in advertising. If that isn't enough, I used to be a musician. And I played Glastonbury. And I've even written some music for some of the first few Grand Theft Auto video games. So if you've ever played them, and you heard the cop saying, buster, that was me. And the title track was me too.

Hannah Mason 01:53

Wow. Yeah. See if anyone could beat that intro. You're known for your specialisms in ABCDs brand and culture — advertising, branding, communications, and digital is the traditional way of describing that. So with the huge changes in 2020, is it time for a new set of ABCDs, and I've got a suggestion here from someone at the AMA, which could be perhaps based on activism, Black Lives Matter, COVID-19 and disruption. Or maybe you could think of a different set of ABCDs that you'd like to, to slip in here.

Jonathan Wilson 02:33

Hey, that's kind of cool. So ABCDs, it was a way that I decided to describe what it is that I do, right? So because people always ask you what you do. And it becomes a very long-winded intro, like the one I just gave you. And so I came up with this acronym, the ABCD standard for advertising, branding, communication, digital, because to me, apart from being what I do, they're really important. And I think that they're really important not just for businesses, but also they're important to consumers and society. Now, that might sound really strange, but to say that they're important to consumers, because you know, a lot of us just don't want to see adverts, AdWords are an unwanted interruption, right. But I mean, important, because actually, branding advertising have become a sort of language. Or they are image shapers and identity makers, so that, you know, when we think about doing a Google or doing a wiki, or you know, people talk about jumping on a Skype call, actually, they don't, who does Skype anymore, jumping on a Zoom call, or MS Teams call? Even? I don't know what jumping on a call is actually. Because like, it's just to make it sound cool, right. But I think one of the things I realized is that then coming from an advertising background, that making things kind of quick, chirpy and easy to understand was important.

And it was those things in particular that I could see, were having a massive impact on our everyday lived experiences. So, you know, like when I look at your backronym Yeah, I think that there's a really good point, though, because actually, this accelerated use of social media. And how we're expressing ourselves is really I guess what you're saying within those, you know, activism, Black Lives Matter COVID and disruption. You're never before have we been all plunged into this virtual world on lockdown, isolation, sharing everything, whether that's that you've bleached dyed your pants, like, I realized that like, you know, I had nothing better to do in the summer it was so hot, I cut my some of my work trousers into shorts. And I was like messing around, I did some bleach dyeing. And then I realized

that like loads of people were doing and I thought who incepted me? And I got all these people saying, like, what was your recipe like, I really like the colors that you did, and then you realize that everybody's baking, right? Everyone's doing yoga in front of a TV screen. And so there was there was a kind of a very communal experience.

And, and I found that interesting and, you know, on the other side of the fence, then you know, we can see that that's been mobilized for Black Lives Matter. And that's been very powerful and is more powerful than, you know, for those of us that can remember, like the wave in the 90s of consciousness, with the Rodney King beating, and then, you know, there's this whole, like, you know, wave of hip hop music, and Malcolm X autobiography, movies, and people wearing African beads and, and doing the right thing and braids and stuff. And it was, you know, I mean, I was kind of a union at that time. So it was really fascinating to me. And then it, almost like people forgot that type of activism, and it's back again, but he's back kind of on steroids. And I think that's interesting.

But on the other side, as well, it's, it's all of these terms that we've got this year, especially all like, you know, academics are as guilty as journalists or politicians, you know, let me give you a couple collective individualism. They kind of make sense that that kind of paradoxical and oxymoronic that, you know, we are individuals, we want to express our unique selves, but we want to do that in a community or fake news. It's not acceptable to say that something is fake news. Thanks, Donald. But, you know, a couple of years ago said, hey, that's fake news. What does that actually mean? What's another one, alternative truths, more sort of hippie.

Like, I was brought to think that there was good and bad, right and wrong, I get that there are different perspectives and points of view, but alternative truths. It's like some others, it's some herbal remedy or something like, so I just find those things interesting that we're becoming, you know, some would argue more tribal, more polarized, and fractured. And then you might say, a Brexit. Brexit is a key example in this country. But then, I also think is worth mentioning that, you know, on my travels, that there are other communities where this has been very positive, where they haven't been able to express themselves as individuals. So people often kind of look at like, you know, Europe or North America and say, you know, all these things are going on, people are becoming polarized and fractured. But then what about if you are in nations where they were far more collectivist, and you never expressed your individual self, or if we can see, you know, going a few years back, but the Arab Spring, and you can see some of the things that are going on, in other countries, I mean, unfortunately, what's going on in Nigeria at the minute, but there is, you know, it's easy for us to think that this is new, it's not new, but I think that we have these waves of consciousness. And we're going through another wave right now.

And it's going to be interesting to see what the kind of the result of those things is. I remembered, like, you know, I've got, like a PhD student who, who did her doctorate on the Arab Spring, and looking at what advertising was offensive to the Egyptians, because there's a lot of talk about religiosity, and how people feel and in the end, her study showed that actually, people aren't that offended by a lot of adverts. Because if you don't have what running water, or electricity, it's those things that concern you more, and actually, beyond things like religion and stuff like that. It's, it's really, your parents that influence how you think. And, and so sometimes I think it's good to kind of take a longitudinal view and

to have that reality check to think actually, you know, we are human beings. And if you go through history, there have been far worse things happening in many countries. But what is the result of this? Who knows? I mean, I joked, after the Arab Spring, I said that in Dubai, the only spring that they're gonna have is the Arab Spring sale. Because I couldn't see the activism happening in that part of the world, but I can see some discounted, you know, clothes or something. But yeah, who knows, I'd like to think that there is a lasting change. But I think the reality is that, you know, humans are very good at demonstrating how easily they can forgive and forget. So like, you know, this week I'm seeing like people, some people boycotting French products in the Middle East, the Middle East, and the other Muslim countries that are always boycotting products, but then they're always like, going back to normal again. It's only the media that really picks up and then says, This is disastrous. Like, you know, these people really don't like us, you know, they don't want to eat our French fries. And then there's a whole debate about actually the Belgian and that kind of misses the point so it becomes a kind of distraction.

So I hope that within all this noise that is made For Change beyond blackout Tuesday, beyond like having afros on billboards, beyond saying that, you know, these people really matter to us, then, you know, are we going to reduce the ethnicity pay gap? Are we going to have more representation at the boardroom? And currently people might argue that, you know, with recruitment freezes and businesses going under, that's very difficult. But then the meaningful changes, are we actually going to see proper representation, and representation in all ways, shapes or form. And that doesn't necessarily mean more Oxbridge graduates with afros.

And I mean, I'm not against intelligence, because I'm kind of in the intelligence business, right. But what I mean is, people that have had access to privilege. And, and so we need to be careful about just falling for the obvious mistake having highlighted and this, I think, for me, this is the challenge, because I agree and disagree with a lot of these constructs on one level, we can see that definitely how dark you are, can have an impact on how people treat you. And therefore how you're able to live your life get promoted, express yourself, all of these things. But it'd be a mistake to assume that it's just melanin that dictates you know, your intelligence or your intellect, or, or, you know, the obvious one that, you know, you asked the only black person in your organization about how Africa feels, or something like that. And so we need to kind of bring people together so that having addressed some of these issues, which are really proxy for something deeper and more entrenched, that we can have honest conversations, and we can get back to what we should be doing, which is that there are people from all sorts of backgrounds engaged in these things.

So you're in my organization, if I had one, in an ideal world, wouldn't it be fantastic if your black Nigerian worker was the expert on English, white British culture, and you were pushing them forward as that, and your white English employee was the expert on Nigerian culture and could speak Ebo that's how you're going to change the world is not going to be through a kind of Noah's Ark approach, where we're kind of looked at as animals, these animals do this on our experts, but actually, that we can all properly start to learn and be experts on each other.

Hannah Mason 12:36

Do you worry that there might be a bit of a backlash on you know, so like, in the 80s, there was a lot, you know, ways in which women were sort of able to come out and be very powerful and strong. And then in the 90s, there was kind of a bit of a backlash against that and, and things like lads mags and stuff came out, and it was kind of like, we moved in the opposite direction of feminism, and feminism kind of became a bit of a dirty word. Do you feel like there might be a backlash against all this sort of inclusion and equity?

Jonathan Wilson 13:11

Putting my neck out there? You know, am I allowed to comment as a male? You know, get in trouble. Yeah, there is going to be a backlash. And what I find fascinating is kind of what social media is putting forward because I didn't think in my lifetime, but that certain feminists would get we be getting attacked by other females verbally about the positions that they're holding. And this is not me necessarily taking sides. But it's just interesting that they're not being attacked by people that any more necessarily extreme in their opinions. They're offering an alternative opinion, which might even be argued philosophically as being one which is counterproductive, which is actually undermining some of the work that's been done.

And it's not my position to say who's right and who's wrong. But I find that fascinating, because I kind of felt that previously, people were in these camps, and they were allowed to exist in particular lanes, but now what we see is something like canceled culture, where if somebody has an opposing view that has to be cancelled. And so sometimes, I wonder if, you know, if, if we're going too far in that regard, that we don't allow debate, even if it is uncomfortable, and even if it is offensive. So for example, some people would talk about not taking the stage with certain individuals, or if there was a lack of representation, they wouldn't want to be associated. And that's a difficult one, right? Because, then what you think is that like, you know, if that school of thought gets interpreted Power, then how do you have difference of opinion from another, you know, from another area.

And I think that a good society needs to have a balance, just like, you know, for a healthy diet of social media, I might follow a few Satan worshippers just to see what they're saying on the other side of the fence, right? Because I just want to understand what everyone's thinking about. So when we think about women always being attacked, and always been trampled down. And it's good to see that at least now, it's not, they're not having to defend the right to have to open that discussion. I mean, that is one thing that we've moved forward on.

But then what becomes slightly tricky is, for example, if you're a woman of color, so if we think about feminism, or like, you know, all these views benefiting all women, or are some women being profiled, and you look on social media, you know, there are different terms like passing as another term women who appear to have European features or who are mixed race or light skinned, are, you know, technically or biologically representing community, but it's not necessarily benefiting everybody. So colorism could be an issue, and chemo I mean, if we then get down to it, then we think about some of the double, triple, quadruple penalties if you are a dark skinned black, female, Muslim woman who wears a headscarf you're suffering a lot of discrimination from all different corners of the world. And it's very difficult then to deal with some of these issues. Because then what does that mean? It means that

we have to keep faith in going on this on this path. But it doesn't mean then that we have to find somebody who then in some respects becomes a box tech is like, great, we've got somebody who, you know, is being discriminated against on every way, shape, or form. Right, great. So we've kind of solved that problem. And that would be a mistake, because then that isn't representative of the lived experiences of enough people.

But yeah, I mean, I guess to summarize, it's, how do we manage difference of opinion. And I think that's, that's challenging that, you know, people do deserve the right to express themselves, but then it's very difficult when things can be funded and amplified and the dog whistles on social media, you know, it does kind of become inevitable that you want to stop some people from having those opinions, because they are damaging and dangerous. But at the same time, I think it'd be damaging and dangerous to have a society where no one is able to experiment. And I would add to that, the right to be forgiven. Because I'm lucky, I grew up when the internet wasn't around, heaven only knows whether I was still have a career.

You know, if I think about how I was, as a teenager growing up the things I would have said the pranks, all of those things. Now, you know, I can I'm, you know, not on the internet. My life is on the internet. But there are people who are kind of born into the internet. And they leave a long trail of opinions. And we see that now where someone can dig about 10 years ago, you said something that was really racist, but the context could be stripped from it. And that person has to apologize, which is fair enough. But they might not be forgiven is like, you know, you were racist 10 years ago, so now you're, you are racist. Like, how do we deal with that? Or how do we deal with what might happen, which is that the Black Lives Matter, phrase then gets co-opted and it then becomes something dangerous, or in the same way as now, the music industry, some people in the industry are debating about the term BAME.

BAME came about, to kind of update, BME. And now BAME is getting the backlash was like, No, no, no, I don't want to be called BAME, it doesn't represent me. And I don't know what you replace that with. Because, you know, colored, we can't use anymore unless you're in South Africa, right? And that got replaced with Black and Black is okay. But Black doesn't make sense to me either, because you classify someone according to their skin color, but everyone else gets it according to their geography or their heritage. And what does a black person in the Caribbean have in common with a black person in Africa, or in South America or in like, you know, Australia or something?

As I said before, yeah, discrimination on some level, but not enough to then say that we are a community but currently, we have no problem with black music or black history, or black culture. So I'm fascinated by how these words change and in terms of how they're interpreted, and how they use them when they can kind of come in fashion and out of fashion when they become offensive. And I think the mistake that people make often is They treated like branding, which is our we need to rebrand we need a new name, but I think they missed the point which is that this is not the words fault. The terms fault is it, it wasn't there wasn't enough progress, or it was used by the wrong people. Like, for example, if you look at the history of the word 'woke', it's been around for a long time. But it's, it's become a bit of 'Oh, you're 'woke' are you?' Like, yeah, like you're supposed, like, you know, you're easily offended, you know, you're just in it for the ride, you just want to, you know, you don't want to be seen, like, you know,

being an activist. And so they kind of missed what that word actually means that and so like, who would call themselves woke? When you see that kind of right wing people kind of poking fun at you.

Hannah Mason 20:52

Do you know what the origins of the word 'woke' are? Because, you know, I didn't notice 'woke' before so much. But now it's been used as a slur. Yes, that is something that really, you know, jars me and irritates me.

Jonathan Wilson 21:07

I remember reading, like a whole paper on it, but it's rooted in, in being conscious - rooted in consciousness, that you are all you have, you know, you have reached consciousness and awareness and the reality of your situation. And hence the past tense. Yeah. You know, you're ready for the struggle.

Hannah Mason 21:29

Who wouldn't want to be aware of their situation and the reality of their situation?

Jonathan Wilson 21:36

Yeah. But it's yet another of those things that you know, like, but yeah, it was used in the American Civil Rights movement by African Americans. And now, it's just become a, you know, it's been chopped by the wayside. And that's a shame.

Hannah Mason 21:53

Yeah. Yeah. It's a big shame. I suppose I should ask you another question. Should I go on then? You wrote an article last year for Marketers Magazine predicting what the next 10 years held for marketing. So if you're going to write it now, starting today, what will change?

Jonathan Wilson 22:15

So I'm kind of lucky, right? Because I wrote it a couple of years ago. And I say, I'm lucky because I picked a picture, like one of the pictures of my school that I picked was of Marcus Rushford. Right? I noticed that, yeah, so since then, he's picked up an honorary doctorate. And he's campaigned on child food poverty, so I'd get a massive tick, but you know, markers would stay in my article, right. And also mentioned fortnight video game.

And this year was it was Travis Scott, who picked up 27 million players, and 45 million attendees in his in game album concert. So I'd get another massive tick right being because to me, at the time, fortnight was like a phenomenon with regards seeing kids in the playground, dancing, but you know, to think that a musician is performing in a game, and getting that amount of attention is ridiculous. And recently, like, we can see that the, you know, some of the US politicians are on Twitch playing games, I think, yeah, I saw a BBC click program where Stormzy is doing a music video where it's got game capture in it. So I think that, you know, I would spend more time investigating the impact of gaming on more of us. And,

you know, having said that, I did some work with Grand Theft Auto. I'm not a gamer. I didn't Yeah, I've never really played the game, to be honest. But I did see something about how people behave like the amount of hours that people are willing to spend in front of a screen. I mean, if you think about people now, going online, watching people play games, it's kind of surreal. And the game was like, there was a you know, there's a school kid who won a gaming competition and was able to buy a house for his mum, and buy a house close to school. It's like, Whoa, you know, so I'd look more at gaming. And I guess, you know, I didn't know about Zoom, because people were still thinking about, like, you know, video being video calls, but like, as I said, Skype hasn't really done anything. But then, you know, Microsoft Teams and Zoom have come out of nowhere. I did mention that Slack wasn't really doing much. And Slack still isn't doing much so we can see. Yeah.

Hannah Mason 24:34

That's what it says on the tin.

Jonathan Wilson 24:36

Slack. Sorry, Slack. So it's interesting that you see all of these tech companies come in and out of fashion. And we're still kind of wrapping our head around social media. And I guess I would make more crazy predictions, because it seems like after the year that we've had I could have said some more crazy things right. So What else would I have said, I think that because we're online more, and we're working from home, My top tip to anyone listening who's still listening, right would be Think about your business, or you building a pop up studio. Because even now we're doing this podcast and we're not in the same room together, you're up north, and I'm down south. And I can see that there are going to be many more things beyond just being on a zoom call, where more of us will be content creators, because it makes sense. It's cheap, it's efficient, it's direct. And we will all have to learn how to become better at looking into that small little circle, and looking sincere. In the same way, as you know, actors do and are very good at doing that, or newsreaders.

And I think more of us are going to get into that and editing. So I think that beyond just vlogging, I think that you know, having a pop up studio, where we can have more control over delivering content in a timely fashion, I think that's going to be a big thing. What else would I say? So then that means that we're kind of thinking like a media company, right. And so I think that we can learn a lot from kind of coming outside of our disciplines. And, you know, maybe it's because I'm a musician, but I think that, you know, that will mean that for business people, if you think about as a musician, that you basically go into isolation, lock yourself away, write an album, so you, you know, and then you go out and promote it and go on tour and perform it, you've got, you've kind of got this sporadic social lifestyle. And I can see more of us doing that there. When we get sick of kind of rolling news and social media 24/7, rather than say it's a waste of time, I think that we're going to do it in bursts. And if we do it in bursts, then it's going to be something which is more meaningful, where when you come online, you're going to say something, which is worthwhile, so I could see quality rising.

And I can also see that, you know, with online education. Yeah, I think universities are going to face a massive challenge. Because currently, you know, we're delivering online education, people are putting us in the spotlight with regards value for money. And I think as brands go, you know, some universities have been around for like centuries, and have been used to having a privileged position where we're

giving some of the most powerful pieces of paper in the world, right, these papers can have a transformative effect on your life.

But there are going to be more companies. And I know that some Professors have spoken about this, like Scott Galloway, but I can see tech companies. So currently, now we know that LinkedIn is not just for jobs, like work, there are things like LinkedIn learning, they've just released daily stories like Instagram, you've got LinkedIn live, and there are loads of people that are behaving like kind of local radio DJs, putting other broadcasts, so there's gonna be a lot more of that, but then it's not going to be an add on, it might be a replacement, because once LinkedIn, or Google, or any of these can get closer towards awarding a piece of paper, which has a similar value for less money, then less people will go to University.

And I remember, maybe it was about six years ago, I kind of joke. Partly joking when I said, you know, the amount of internet searching we do now Google should award us a degree based upon our browser history, the pages we visited, how long we spend on them, because there's enough data there. But I actually think that I could really see that being the case that people are credited for the activities were effectively were being tracked and watched in a very big brother way. But people will accept being tracked and watched by their listening Alexa devices or their iPhones or their webcams, and you'll get rewards for it, you get rewarded for giving up all of this data on all of your personal secrets like are based upon your work. You deserve a certificate in like anthropology. Cool. So I could see some of those things happening.

Hannah Mason 29:11

It's a very black mirror.

Jonathan Wilson 29:13

Yeah. And of course all the other stuff like all the filters - filtered fun, you know, people like you know, slimming themselves in front of the zoom camera putting on makeup and stuff like that, that's all gonna be crazy.

Hannah Mason 29:26

Have you seen the apps that changed your camera angle so that when you're talking in Zoom at the moment, you can probably see I'm looking at you and my I'm not actually looking straight into the camera, because I'm looking at my little image of your face on my screen. So there's like an AI version of your face that can be made to look like you're looking down the camera - it's really spooky.

Jonathan Wilson 29:56

I've tried some AI so I actually signed up as a company that can make content easier. And you can feed them text and they have these models. And they will like, say the text. So I've got all these ones saying Professor Wilson says that branding is really important and, and that's cool, because then when you flip the language, Professor Wilson is now like being quoted in Thai in Arabic and, and just at the click of a button, but if I had the money, they could video capture my face. Because I saw it what hooked me in was the fact that they gave two case examples. One was Snoop Dogg, who did this just a

advert and when it was being broadcast in Australia - the brand is not called Just Eat. So rather than reshoot the advert, they changed his mouth to say the name of the other company. And if you look at David Beckham, they had do an advert and they had David Beckham like speaking, like nine different languages, which they have your back and can't really speak different languages,

Hannah Mason 30:57

or try really hard not to laugh or they're really loud.

Jonathan Wilson 31:02

That was my David Beckham impression. But it was like you suddenly you've got like David Beckham, speaking average, like how happy he is like what David is like, it's not a good in Arabic these days, but AI is only going to get better. So that yeah, this idea of deep fake. And at the minute, they're controlling it, because it's subscription based, and they have to vet you, and they're asking you what purpose it is that you're using it for. But once the software gets out there, God only knows what's going to happen. Yeah, God only knows. Yeah,

Hannah Mason 31:33

This is a very terrifying dystopian kind of future we're looking at, or is it exciting?

Jonathan Wilson 31:40

Well, I could just get an AI, Professor Wilson to just go and surf the internet on my behalf. Go and curate some content, knock up a little video. upload it onto LinkedIn. And all I'm doing is I'm in my house, like eating Beef Rendang playing my guitar. And I don't even know what he's doing. Because this AI me is just, he's killing it right now. Because he's so articulate. He's talking in different languages, different time zones, like 20 hours a day. No, that's mad. And I think even more extreme people have debated whether robots should have their own employment law.

Hannah Mason 32:23

Really?

Jonathan Wilson 32:24

Yeah. Well, I know it sounds strange, right? But then, like, follow me on this one. If you are giving robots AI, right, in the same way as like, think about the robots and Star Wars that have a personality, you wouldn't think of abusing the robots in Star Wars. Because they have a personality. So if we're going towards that reality, that means that their rights have to be protected. They can't be abused. And in the interim, I can easily see, like, you know, that printer that you have, that's not that's jammed, that you slap telling the manufacturer, you know, she slapped me, hurt, it really hurt my feelings, and it hurt the cartridge and they go, Okay, you've just invalidated your warranty for abusing your printer. We can, and we can get you some help with a psychotherapist, for your you know, for your passive aggression.

But I can see that the more that we have Internet of Things, and these objects are communicating and collecting data and sending data and thinking. But yeah, it's going to be like one of these science fiction movies where robots are going to have feelings, and therefore they're going to have rights. And we're going to be fighting with robots because they're going to be taking our jobs away. And remember, it was

it was Johnny Vaughn on a one radio show where he was talking about how when he goes to the supermarket, he always goes to the counter with the human. Because he feels it's his duty as a fellow human. Because he doesn't like seeing those people that are stood in the corner, what well, we all scan around items. looking longingly at the scanning machine. Good. I used to have that job. So until the robot took it away. So sadly, I think that we are going to have to kind of think about, you know, what roles are going to be replaced? And if that's good, or if that's bad?

Hannah Mason 34:29

Yeah, we are. And it brings up lots of a lot of moral issues, which kind of brings us back to that that conversation that we were having earlier on about us being sort of more collaborative and yet more polarized.

Jonathan Wilson 34:43

Yeah, I mean, like, take football, for example. And how like with lockdown, they're having football games, in empty stadiums. It's interesting that like, you know, the solution was that you know, the vibe wasn't there for the viewers. So they had kind of like They couldn't have canned laughter for sitcoms, and it worked. You know, people felt like, Oh, this is like, yeah, I feel like this is the game. And if you watch enough games, you'd see that they even knew the chance for the different football teams. And it wasn't just the steady noise you went, who, like went up and down if there was a foul and stuff like that. And it was like, wow, this is cool. But then, after a while, the novelty wears off. And then it's like, I thought, I'm kind of getting into like, no crowd now. So you hit the button that says, I don't want to hear the crowd. And then you just hit the empty Stadium, and the third the, of the football. Wow, that was a hard cake. And I started to enjoy football in a different way. Because now I can hear the coach shouting. And the team, which I couldn't hear before.

And so I think it's interesting how we are going to see so with technology, there'll be the novelty element, which will take us forward. But then I think there'll be a pullback, where it's like, I don't know, if it's as good. Like, I don't know how many people are still enthused about doing all of these zoom calls. And how many people are going to go back to old school calls where it was enough just to hear someone's voice, you know, but now he's like, they need to see you, right. And I think that we're going to cut back. But I think the thing that will remain is just the idea of scheduled calls for a certain amount of time that like now if you look at smartphones, you know, people very few people, well, it actually depends on who your friend group is or how old you are. But I don't really have many people that phoned me out of the blue, because they know that the phone isn't going to get answered. Like if you want to call somebody, you book a time. And once upon a time, that would have seemed just so cold and professional, like you said to your friends. Okay, so what time you're gonna call me, right? Who are you, Johnny? Like, what's going to you? But whereas now it's like, no, I get it, because you could be using your phone to watch a movie, some people are probably on the toilet, you know, could be in the middle of texting your best photograph on Instagram, and then it all gets lost because someone dials.

So we've all kind of got used to the idea that a phone is more than just a phone basically. And so this idea of, of kind of the unsolicited call is just so old school. And now the interesting thing for me then is that what's come back in fashion and people leaving audio messages, almost like walkie-talkies, where

you don't wanna get into a phone call, because you don't have the time. But you're quite happy to leave an audio message, when no one can interrupt you for like 60 seconds. And then that's it done.

Hannah Mason 37:44

Gosh, were really, really complicated creatures.

Jonathan Wilson 37:48

That's what people forget. We're not just animals, we are like, really complicated organisms.

Hannah Mason 37:54

Yeah. Because when you're talking about going to football matches, when you go in person, it's, it's not just watching something is all of your senses are involved in that sort of activity. And the things that we're doing online, we were kind of using different senses or different, you know, we get fatigued with zoom, because we're really, really concentrating on what we're seeing, and hearing. But there's then the other senses aren't, you know, kicking in, like, smell or touch?

Jonathan Wilson 38:29

Yeah. And we're not getting data back. Yeah, that's the other side. The reason it's fatiguing is because you're actually having to think, like, you know, I've been doing two hour lectures online for university and you can't tell if people are understanding what you're saying, or you don't see kind of, you know, the eyes move to the left or the right, like you know, all those triggers that I'd look for before. Or if people are leaning in or leaning back. When is a good time to take a break because, you know, people you can't tell there's a lag. Conversations aren't free flowing. And all of those things are just kind of lead to a mental drain.

Hannah Mason 39:08

I hope I'm not mentally draining you right now, because I've got a couple of questions I want to ask you.

Jonathan Wilson 39:12

Keep asking this is good.

Hannah Mason 39:15

So after decades of protests this September, Bristol's Colston Hall has changed its name to Bristol Beacon, ending over 150 year association with the slave trader Edward Colston, they're deeply committed to making sure that the new name isn't just the sign above the door. With your huge experience in brand strategy, what advice would you give not just Bristol Beacon, but any organization big or small as they go through the change to become more inclusive?

Jonathan Wilson 39:45

When changes are interesting, my favorite example of a name change is actually when you look at people. And so I'm going to mention Cassius Clay changing his name to Muhammad Ali. Right that had a massive effect. But he would have been short lived if he couldn't give those knockout punches. And it might even have backfired. And I use that as an example then to say that, like, you know, there is

always a kind of, there's a sense that that companies when they want to start afresh, they, they come up with a new name, and it's okay, a fresh start, and it works to a point. But if you want to make a meaningful difference, it takes time and commitment. And that can't be kind of just one way broadcasting by saying, you know, I want to make a change, or we are going to make a change. You got reciprocity, you need recognition, to me it's an iterative journey of experimentation and an exploration.

So if that's the case, people need to be honest, don't over promise, because you're going to take people on a journey. And just, you have to ignore kind of, you know, chasing headlines, and pumping out propaganda because there's nothing worse, it's a really bad look to say, okay, we're going to make a change, you change your name, and then and then things die down, or you make a hell of a mistake. because inevitably, we're all going to make mistakes. But if you over promise, people are really going to be judgmental.

So I would say that, you know, there should be less focus on the name and more focus on just showing what's going on. And that's important for any organization, brand product service, especially in light of this because you know, that there are going to be a vocal minority of people who will be scrutinizing your every action. Did you celebrate Black History Month? Do you have representation on the board level, you know, like, anything that you want to you want to pull out, there's gonna be someone that's gonna mention those things. And so you want to be in a position where you can demonstrate you have enough material and evidence to suggest that you know, what you're doing is the good fight.

Hannah Mason 42:01

What advice would you give to organizations who are resistant to change?

Jonathan Wilson 42:06

Don't be - I'm joking. Because they do it? No, yeah, just do it. Be like Nike, just do it. I think that people are often resistant to change. Because they see it as standing still. And they see standing still as being a wise thing to do. But I'm going to kind of argue want to reframe it and think that like, you know, it's not, it's not standing still, if the landscape is constantly changing. And I think that's the mistake. So a better analogy would be like, you know, treading water in a river. Right? If you want to remain still, in a flowing river, it requires a lot of energy, and a lot more work than going with the flow. Now, that's not to say that you should always go with the flow. But you should be aware that if you want to stand still or remain still, tread water, remained in the same position, be prepared for the fact that you are missing out on a number of opportunities. And it's going to cost a lot of money, and you're going to use up a lot of energy. So I think that that's one of the mistakes organizations make. Because their business model or their mindset isn't really taking those things into account.

People are going to disagree with me, I know, they're gonna say, Well, actually, if I do nothing, if I have no diversity and inclusion training, or if I don't make the effort to find these people, then you know, I'm not actually you know, wasting resources. But then you don't know what other competitors are doing. Like if they're able to improve their brand value, if they're able to make more sales, if they're getting more PR than you for being good at doing those things. And you're still spending money that I'm sure that there are areas that I could point to that would make you realize that you know, if you're that

organization that you could be doing better. So kind of one of my bits of advice would be, you know, no surprise here, get the advice of experts, right? And people that look outside of your immediate domain, because they're going to have a top down view on what's going on the landscape. I don't expect organizations to be able to change in terms of their DNA overnight, or senior management, but they can at least consult with experts from time to time to say, are we going in the right direction? And what does that look like?

Hannah Mason 44:28

Yeah, I absolutely agree. I think on the board level, though, at a governance level, sometimes that resistance to change, is you know, I really like the idea that you're you have to tread water in a in a flowing river. Because I don't think that necessarily boards always have that view. And they feel there's a safety in staying the same or safety and doing things the way they've always done them.

Jonathan Wilson 44:57

Yes.

Hannah Mason 44:58

How do you light a fire under your board and get them to take risks. A word they don't like,

Jonathan Wilson 45:07

I guess, they think is a risk and is not. I mean, if you think about some of the things that I've heard, you know, they might assume that you're different, because you look different. But they might not. But they haven't thought about actually what motivates them. Like, you know, for example, you all might like cricket. Or you all might like certain literature, the early the assumption that, like, you know, if you look at me as being a black person that, that I live on a diet have to park. Yeah. And you know, I'm, you know, I'm only listening to Dave Chappelle. And well, no, you know, I can, I can rock the Iliad. You know, I'm classically trained as a musician. You know, I like bland food, too, is, you know, my dad's white too. You know, it's kind of like, it's, it's sometimes finding spaces where you can just pop those bubbles that they're in those echo chambers and get them to kind of almost try before they buy. And that's why I think networking is really important, because I am confident that if you're part of the battle for me is like, if I don't get to that table, and that probably means, you know, like, like anyone else applying for jobs, filling out forms, interviewing, but if I'm in a nervous situation where you're networking, I'm confident that I can communicate those things that would reassure people that they would suspend those thoughts for me, or people like me. And I think that's the challenge.

So we often don't have the opportunities, because we're put through even, you know, the risk of sounding controversial, more rigorous, formalized systems, which don't necessarily yield the results that we're looking for. So people might think, Okay, this system is not fair. So we need to monitor the ethnic groups. Okay, we do, but that's a separate issue, or we need to ask more questions, or we need longer interviews, but they haven't thought about just properly understanding what it is that they're missing out on. And I think that's why, you know, events or discussions like this are really important.

So, if you're going to get people to change, it's that they understand that there is no risk that you're safe pair of hands. And then there's the other side. And I know that for previous employers, sometimes they

felt that I might be a risk. Because you know, the more senior you get, and they think, you know, do we really want a black guy with an afro being the image that represents our organization in the marketplace? Is that really what we want, you know, what will people think of us. But what I found is that I've used, I've been able to mobilize things like LinkedIn to my advantage, because then when organizing, at the time, when they see that there are other people in other organizations, liking or commenting on your posts, and, and you are allowed to express yourself in the way whether that's having a sense of humor, or make these points, it's like, oh, he's still alive, or, you know, he's still he still gets to go to these countries, then he must be okay.

So there's something about being able to kind of showcase your skills, and have your peers review them. And that's often what minority groups are not able to do. And is it the level playing field, therefore, is is also in that domain? And often what happens then is, you know, somebody find your email address, and you don't know who and they say, do you want to go on one of these, like mentorship programs for people of color? And how the hell did you know that I was like, Okay, my face is on social media, but it's like, okay, you think Did you offer this to the white people? Is it to everyone or just mean that? No, no, we found you. Would you like to be mentored? Actually, what you want to say and what you say to your computer is? No, I should be mentoring your, you should be mentored. Because it's not me that needs it.

You know, some that might sound arrogant to some but I think often what you find is that, you know, how, like, I could argue, like, you know, I'm in my mid 40s. I've got two doctorates. Like, how many more qualifications Do I have to get to prove that I can be trusted? Right? I can work in isolation in solitude, I can read books, and I can, I can not get in trouble. You can't become a professor or get a doctorate, if you misbehave. Because even to become a professor, you need a minimum of five references of people within your fields that are willing to support your application. So sometimes I kind of laugh when people say, Well, you know you're a bit young We're not sure you're quite ready yet, when am I going to be ready with my Afro is white, like, seriously.

So I think that for a lot of us, like even in American football, they tried the Rooney Rule, which is just give people a chance. And I think that, you know, organization's needs to be encouraged and perhaps in a gig economy, that there might be more of that, which is, look, just give me a chance. And I'll show you what I can do. And as long as you know, the culture is is conducive and positive, and people aren't just waiting for you to fail, then I think that that would help in many ways, but I don't think necessarily that things are just automatically going to change.

Like, I remember at school, my biology teacher saying, in the future, everyone's going to be a kind of milky coffee color. Because we'll all just get on mix, you know, the world will all look the same. And I think what I've seen decades later, is that we're not all gonna look the same. Like, you know, racism is around live and kicking is not it's not going to disappear. So if I'm taking a pragmatic view, which is some people will remain racist, maybe less racist, but they will remain racist or prejudiced, or discriminate, but how can we then find opportunities to get round to those things? I think sometimes perhaps, you know, we can, it's easy to become idealistic. But actually, but to get back to your the heart of the matter, you know, it's like, in some, like, you don't need you know, when we get caught up in these, these kind of circular debates about which cricket team you support, whether you support

Pakistan, or England or West Indies or England and stuff, you know, and that's not an indicator as to how loyal you ought to be to this organization, or how British you are. We're just like, let's get back to brass tacks, you know, can I help you make money or save money? Am I harder working? The new? Am I more articulate? Can I open up new markets? Do I understand things? Can I show you things that perhaps you didn't understand. And I think that that does come back to those, those opportunities to highlight how important some of those things are. And the only thing that gives me faith is being alive long enough to see change.

Because if I go back to hip hop music, you know, once upon a time, like at NACA, we call that plagiarism. They're taking music from artists chopping it up, and they're speaking over the top of it, and it's not real music. Well, it really is real music, when you see how many billionaires with your Dr. Dre, Jay Z Kanye, if you see, like, you know, how many adverts it's been used for, if you see like, you know, the profound effect it's having on many people's lives and, and how many people who are not black, in places like Germany, Poland, Russia, if you look at the stats, who are consuming hip hop music, especially with the generation Zed, then you can see, of course, legitimately is a music form. But that only comes over time.

So I think that, you know, being patient is important as well. So if it's, whether that's branding, whether that's kind of trying to address these issues, you know, I guess I always try to remind myself that, you know, we're on a journey. And so me to tighten my belt. And if I'm going to last on this journey, then that means kind of like, you know, having a good business strategy, and, you know, and a good pathway that you've mapped out, but that you are in a position, whether that's your health, whether that's your wealth, or your family unit, to be able to last that journey and not to burn yourself out, not to get yourself in debt. Because otherwise that's going to, people are going to try and force the issue that they're going to feel that their business or their professional career needs to provide results immediately.

And, and I've learned that from talking to so wise people who are much older than me, like you know, I've spoken to professors in the 80s, a number of professors who are still active speaking, writing, and you know, and it's fascinating to me just to see what their view is, and that a lot more chilled out. Because they have the wisdom of hindsight. And so I guess that one of the things that I learned from these wise old professors was they were always encouraging me to take more risks, to stand up and be counted, to do things to be selfish about doing things that I think are valuable or interesting, and not necessarily to be too focused on what other people think.

So going back to all of those points, I'm happy to go along with a ride with black lives matter. I'm happy to identify as a black person to be part of a community. But in some respects, those things to me are meaningless. The journey that I'm on is more meaningful. And you know, and I remember Joe In a talk, where I said to the audience, I didn't know that I had a black mother and a white father until I went to school. Because before that they were mom and dad.

But the minute that I went to school, it changed all of our lives because I came home with that, whatever you want to call it, that poison. Where we're now, you know, I became racialized in the eyes

of my parents, too, because I'm now that I'm being treated a different way than other children and stuff. And I suppose. Yeah, that's why I'm fascinated by humans, I guess.

Hannah Mason 55:39

Yes, we are fascinating, complicated creatures. Going back to your point about everyone being the same color. Oh, that sounds like a nightmare. You know, let's all love the coffee color. Coffee colored humans. No. I think we need to have our differences. And you know, the odd racist in the mix to keep us on our toes.

Jonathan Wilson 56:06

One racist a day takes complacency away.

Hannah Mason 56:09

I think Yeah. A day maybe too much. A decade.

Jonathan Wilson 56:15

Have you made friends with a racist today? Yeah. Proper balanced diet. Yeah, befriend a racist. meet others there. Yeah,

Hannah Mason 56:23

There's the odd person dotted around so that we don't just get too complacent.

Jonathan Wilson 56:28

Make a racist fall in love with you. Set yourself challenges.

Hannah Mason 56:33

Yeah. Take it take a racist to school day. No.

Jonathan Wilson 56:38

That would be cool.

Hannah Mason 56:41

Yes, I have inadvertently taken a racist to school on a number of occasions, but not for my own choice for being sort of chased by them. Anyway.

Jonathan Wilson 56:52

Imagine, hey, I need to pick a racist is gonna come with me, Jeremy, my racist today?

Hannah Mason 56:56

Oh, no, I got off got my homework, I forgot to bring the racist to school. Anyway. And there any questions I've missed? Or that you wished I'd asked you? To kind of wrap up? What should have I asked you?

Jonathan Wilson 57:07

You should've asked me: how can people find you and pay for your services? No I'm joking. I think I would probably ask myself difficult questions like: How can marketing professionals survive in a world where we're being pummeled for from all sides? Or, you know, by the time this podcast goes up, Black Lives Matter, BAME. And all those other terms will be out of fashion? Along with feminism, and stuff like that. So what are we supposed to do? What should businesses do today? Yeah, maybe like that. Those are the money questions, right?

Because if I could answer those, then like, you're going to get more subscribers? I don't have answers to those questions, or I don't have simple answers that don't require kind of a lot of writing and thought, I guess all I could say is, enjoy the journey. Like, I don't think that these are problems sometimes when people ask questions that they want answers. And the answer, I don't know, is seen as being a failure. Or they want solutions. And I know that I can be infuriating and not always offering solutions or immediate solutions. Because I think that that process of trying to understand things from a variety of perspectives, is important. And that that leads to a more robust solution.

Otherwise, if everyone is kind of knee jerk reacting and saying, okay, we need to have a press release in response to Black Lives Matter, then you don't actually bother to work out what Black Lives Matter is or where it's coming from, or how does that feel in a different country or a different community. And that, to me was interesting, because as an academic, I get the opportunity to zone out and to do those things. So you know, one of the things that, you know, I noticed that I thought was interesting was like, you know, when you look at New Zealand, and you look at Australia, and you look at indigenous people there, being behind the Black Lives Matter protests, and making that point, that to me was powerful. And what are you then going to say to these indigenous people who are not in power on their islands. It then changes the debate compared to the UK, when we talk about minorities talking about Black Lives Matter, or we talk about in America where people are descended from slaves, and that not to say that, you know, you might say, but what about Native Americans? But then like, when are they ever in discussions? What about the Latino community? When are they ever in discussions?

So, this is why I'm saying that these problems cannot be solved quickly. But the kind of iterative journey of learning about other cultures and kind of road testing, and almost like Socratic questioning of these problems is really important. So, yeah, my response would be just like, we just have to go on a journey and, and if we're going to go on a journey, then we might as well try and enjoy it. So if we're going to enjoy it, how do we do that? And that's why you to guess that humor is important to me. So like, you know, you can't solve racism without cracking a few racist jokes or not racist jokes, but I mean, jokes about racism. But, but it's looking at the full range of emotions and then thinking.

Okay, so, you know, sometimes we need a timeout, that sometimes, you know, you need to cleanse your soul and that and that could mean okay, like, take a break from campaigning and activism, like, you know, try and find some. So I actively do that, try and find some things that are seemingly unconnected, right, you know, post some vegan recipes, you know, talk about, you know, Nimbus clouds, or, or like smoking salmon or something, and then you probably see some racism in there too. Like, you think, oh, let me look at beekeeping. And then, and then you see a documentary, which I have seen, which says the African bees are more aggressive than the European ones. African bees are bigger and more aggressive, like, Oh, my God, Discovery Channel's racist.

So we can also teach me that we can put meaning into anything, right, we, you know, once we're on something, then our reality shapes around us, but I think it is important to kind of cleanse the palate, and to have that varied experience. So, you know, my last recommendation would be, try and seek the company of people who have attributes and qualities that you're curious about, or you are not like you are from different backgrounds than you and make friends with them. Because that's the thing that surprises me as well, which is that there are, you know, some of these organizations and they say, so how can we like, you know, it's almost like, how can we make friends with black people?

You don't have any black friends? No, like, oh, how to curry ones. Okay, nice. That's a start. But it's like, to me, that's the thing that blows my mind. Like, how do you not know, people from these backgrounds? How have you been living? Seriously, like, you know, with the internet as well? How have you avoided all of these communities that are like populating the world? Like, I just don't get it? Or, or the other thing, which is like, during Black Lives Matter, some white people introducing me to other black people?

Like, like, yeah, I'm sorry, what's going on with Black Lives Matter? I'm just gonna introduce you to another black person, like in South Africa, or America is like, what I really wanted to say was dude introduced which is a more white people that are gonna get me a promotion. That's what Black Lives Matter says to me, it says that we already know who we are. We need more people from outside of our community to befriend us. So enjoy the journey and make some new friends.

Hannah Mason 1:03:32

Thank you so much. That's brilliant.