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Written by **C. Mitchell Shaw** on December 5, 2018

Former Employee Says Facebook Has a Black People Problem; Facebook Removes Post

Despite claims of embracing diversity, Facebook has been accused by a former strategic partner manager for global influencers of having a "black people problem." That former employee, Mark Luckie, wrote a memo that he circulated to all Facebook employees worldwide on November 8, just before he left his job. On November 27, he made it public in a note he posted — ironically, on Facebook. Facebook's response? The company removed his post.

In his memo-turned-Facebook-note, Luckie wrote that "Facebook has a black people problem" that is both internal and external. The problem, he says, involves racial discrimination within the company. Luckie wrote:

> Facebook's disenfranchisement of black people on the platform mirrors the marginalization of its black employees. In my time at the company, I've heard far too many stories from black employees of a colleague or manager calling them "hostile" or "aggressive" for simply sharing their thoughts in a manner not dissimilar from their non-Black team members. A few black employees have reported being specifically dissuaded by their managers from becoming active in the [internal] Black@ group or doing "Black stuff," even if it happens outside of work hours. Too many black employees can recount stories of being aggressively accosted by campus security beyond what was necessary.

On a personal note, at least two or three times a day, every day, a colleague at MPK [Facebook headquarters in Menlo Park] will look directly at me and tap or hold their wallet or shove their hands down their pocket to clutch it tightly until I pass. The frequency is even higher when walking

through Classic campus or Building 20. To feel like an oddity at your own place of employment because of the color of your skin while passing posters reminding you to be your authentic self feels in itself inauthentic.

While Luckie's claims are entirely anecdotal and therefore could be merely a matter of perception, he bolsters his claims by pointing out that going to "HR [Human Resources] is often a dead end." Furthermore, far from anecdotal is the empirical fact that Facebook, while claiming to celebrate diversity (and demanding that standard for everyone else) reported in July that only about four percent of its workforce in the United States is made up of black people. If that's what's passes for diversity, then liberals should stop complaining about "homogenized" neighborhoods nearly devoid of black people.

As far as going to HR to complain about a racially aggressive environment, Luckie wrote that "Black employees will sometimes to turn to HR in search of a resolution, as employees from all backgrounds do." But:

> We often find, however, that our experiences are rationalized away or we're made to believe these disheartening patterns are a figment of our imagination. That our eyes and ears are deceiving us and we're simply not being a team player. It becomes clear that the conversations with HR are more often than not meant to protect the manager and the status quo of Facebook, not support the employee.

Far from wielding a broad brush with which to paint the entire situation, Luckie — who worked for about two years as an editor at the *Washington Post* before working at Facebook — was careful to point out, "Certainly, these aren't the experiences of all black employees," adding, "But these issues are so widespread that they should be an ongoing cause for concern."

As to the external problem of how Facebook deals with black users, Luckie — leaning on his research experience as an editor — wrote that "black people are one of the most engaged demographics on Facebook." Fleshing that out, he wrote:

> Black people are far outpacing other groups on the platform in a slew of engagement metrics. African Americans are more likely to use Facebook to communicate with family and friends daily, according to [research commissioned by Facebook.](#) 63% use Facebook to communicate with family, and 60% use Facebook to communicate with friends at least once a day, compared to 53% and 54% of the total population, respectively. 70% of black U.S. adults use Facebook and 43% use Instagram, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). 55% of black millennials report spending at least one hour a day on social networking sites, 6% higher than all millennials, while 29% say they spend at least three hours a day, 9% higher than all millennials, [Nielsen surveys found](#). Black people are driving the kind of meaningful social interactions Facebook is striving to facilitate.

One might reasonably expect that the social-media giant — driven by both its claims of diversity and the fact that black people represent a significant percentage of its regular users — would treat black users the same as anyone else. One would be reasonable to assume that, but, if Luckie is correct, one would appear to be wrong. Luckie assets that black people routinely find "what are meant to be positive efforts" interpreted as "hate speech" and even "despite them often not violating Facebook's terms of service" those users find "their content removed without notice" and their "accounts suspended indefinitely." He went on to write:

> There is a prevailing theory among many black users that their content is more likely to be taken

down on the platform than any other group. Even though the theories are mostly anecdotal, Facebook does little to dissuade people from this idea. Black people continue to use the platform because for many it is still their best way to connect directly with the causes they care about. Our communities should be able to trust that we have their best interests at heart.

As if to verify the feeling among black users of the social platform that "their content is more likely to be taken down on the platform than any other group," Facebook initially removed Luckie's note, prompting him to use Facebook's biggest competitor to tweet, "Turns out Facebook took down my post challenging discrimination at the company, disabling users' ability to share or read it. Further proves my point."

Only after it became a point of embarrassment did Facebook restore Luckie's post. The company issued a statement that essentially amounts to a non-statement, since it falls short of anything remotely resembling an explanation. The statement, issued by Facebook spokesperson Anthony Harrison, said, "Mark Luckie's post does not violate our Community Standards and is available on our site." Rather than even attempt to explain why it was taken down (as Luckie says often happens to the posts of black people, "despite [those posts] often not violating Facebook's terms of service"), Harrison stated, "We are looking into what happened."

Since this writer works in IT and has an understanding of how data searches within a company work, the last part of the above statement fails the smell test. It would have taken less time for Facebook to find out "what happened" than it took for them to formulate and disseminate a statement pretending they don't already know. After all, they have the data.

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