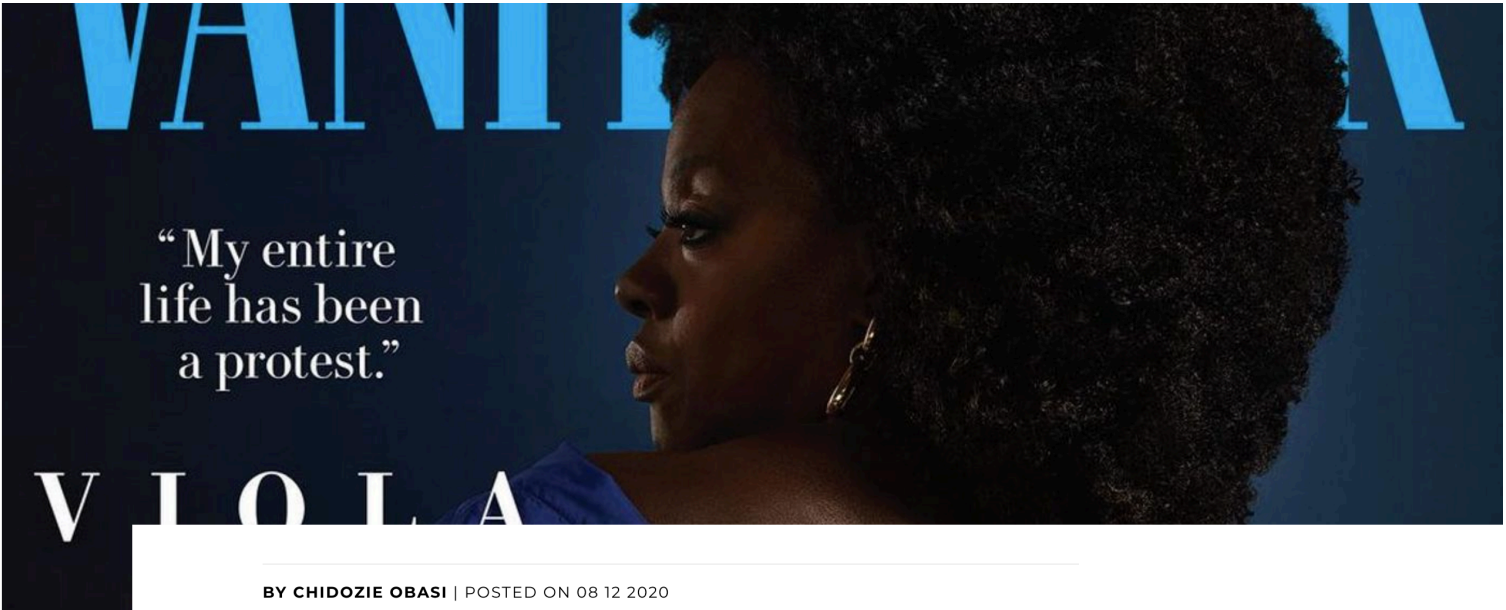




With Greater Diversity On Newsstands, Is Fashion Really Becoming A More Inclusive Space?

Magazine covers, ad campaigns and runways may look more inclusive than they ever have – but does this signal real, positive change in the industry as a whole?



From the global pandemic and financial downturn that followed, 2020 will be looked back on as a pivotal year for fashion. But no other movement quite changed the face of the industry quite like its racial reckoning.

While diversity, or lack thereof, within fashion has remained a talking point for the past decade, it's often hard to tell how committed the industry is to making meaningful, long-term changes, when so many of its companies lack inclusion. But this year presented rays of hope, as the fashion industry was forced to confront its poor track record with race on a scale that hasn't been seen since the #MeToo movement sparked an industry-wide review of its history with sexual misconduct.



Not surprisingly, magazine covers, ad campaigns and runways now look incredibly diverse: from Viola Davis starring on the July/August issue of *Vanity Fair* to *Teen Vogue*'s September issue featuring trans model and activist Munroe Bergdorf to Adwoa Aboah starring on the September British editions of *Vogue* and *ELLE*.



Fashion has always struggled to hit the mark: It's not just about the final output (a cover or runway show cast), but about proactively seeking to diversify the teams of people powering the brands and companies that make up the sprawling global \$2.3 trillion business. This year, though, the culture of homogeneity finally seemed to shift with a wave of coalitions forming to advocate for greater equity including the Fashion Award-winning Black In Fashion Council, founded by Lindsay Peoples Wagner and Sandrine Charles, an organisation of over 400 Black fashion professionals working to advocate for inclusion. And then there was the spike in diversity on newsstands, with a multitude of covers and editorial shoots that were photographed, styled and/or commissioned by diverse teams. After shooting Viola Davis for the cover of *Vanity Fair*, American photographer Dario wrote, 'This is a conversation. A conversation about the subversion of existing structures; what is possible when people of colour are in places of decision-making, and allowed to tell their own stories.'



It's been a long time coming. Editor Nell Kalonji, co-founder of Rubric Initiative, an organisation working to redress the representation imbalance in fashion, concurs: 'In the past, tokenism has played a big role in addressing the lack of diversity [in fashion magazines]. In order to make a real difference we need to look at all areas of the industry - from runways to front rows, backstage to boardrooms. As long as we are not addressing the industry's infrastructure behind the scenes, the presence of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority talent will ultimately be at the mercy of white perspectives.'

Rubric's coalition includes a range of influential designers, image-makers, publicists and editors including Virgil Abloh, Samuel Ross, Campell Addy and Martine Rose. 'I am very hopeful for the future,' she adds. 'Being a part of setting up Rubric has shown me how the fashion community is coming together to bring long-term change. People want to and are actively supporting existing and new organisations dedicated to getting more diverse voices into the room and are working towards empowering and encouraging a new generation of BAME talent to join our industry [and feel represented].'



What can the industry do to keep representation from becoming a trend? Stylist Olive Duran notes the conversation can't end with surface level changes. 'We need to be working on diversifying the teams behind the camera.'

As revered Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe puts it: 'If you only hear one side of the story, you have no understanding at all.'

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