



today:tomorrow

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IN EVERY CRISIS LIES THE BLUEPRINT OF THE FUTURE

Six months—and a lifetime—ago, I introduced my annual trends report with these words: “Following a year made frantic by chaos and existential angst, 2020 will be all about ways to inject calm and clarity into a world that can seem to be spinning out of control.” Little did I know what lurked just ahead. The global pandemic has upended our lives for sure, but, amid all the pain and grief, it has had one potentially positive influence: It has served as a sort of giant pause button, forcing many of us to stay in place, to winnow our activities to only the most vital, and giving us time to consider what genuinely matters and what we feel compelled to change.

As I write this the first week in June, I am, for the first time in months, barely thinking about COVID-19. Instead, I am gripped by news reports of people taking to the streets in cities and towns across the world to protest the racism that for so long has torn lives and communities apart. It is gut-wrenching to see some of the images that have emerged and all too easy to feel defeated. And so I find myself clinging to the affirming stories—the middle school in Minneapolis that received [25,000](#) bags of groceries when it asked for help feeding local families;

the crowdfunding platforms that have raised millions of dollars to help those whose [small businesses](#) have been lost to fire and looting get back on their feet; the in-your-face BLACK LIVES MATTER message the mayor of Washington, D.C. had [emblazoned](#) on a street near the White House. From crisis can come unity and resolve—and maybe even lasting change.

As a trends analyst, I naturally have thought a good deal about how life will change post-COVID-19. I wish I could feel optimistic that it will include a fast and permanent resolution to racial oppression and inequity. I know it will not. Systemic ills are cured slowly if at all, but I do think the community-focused mindset that has emerged during this pandemic will help to bring about some measure of progress. People seem more energized to solve problems we once considered insurmountable. And the communications networks we have



Black Lives Matter protest in Washington, D.C., May 31, 2020

cobbled together during the shutdown will prove useful in keeping changemakers organized and on task.

Amid all this conflict and uncertainty, I am seeing three trends emerge that hold promise for the months and years ahead.

BRANDS ALL IN

When the pandemic began its deadly spread, I [chided](#) companies for using the crisis as an opportunity for PR. I implored them to step up rather than just speak out to address the emergency. These past few days, I have been struck by how many brands have been reaching out to express their thoughts about the



Westin Hotel, Atlanta, GA

protests, convey their support for people of color, and detail ways in which they intend to be part of the solution. GoFundMe emailed to let me know they've committed \$500,000 to a [Justice & Equality Fund](#) that will focus on bail, racial justice, and law enforcement reform. Ben & Jerry's, no stranger to social activism, issued a [public call](#) to "dismantle white supremacy." Best Buy told me they were expanding their network of [Teen Tech Centers](#) to help bridge the digital divide in underserved communities. Thrive Market (my go-to during the shutdown) reached out to say they were matching employee donations 2:1 to three organizations selected by their workers: [Black Lives Matter](#), [Know Your Rights Camp Legal Defense Initiative](#), and the [Atlanta Solidarity Fund](#).

In all the years we have been seeing racial injustices, this is the first time I can recall so many companies feeling compelled to take a stand. Vitally, they are stepping up, not just speaking out. Might genuine progress result?

A BETTER BALANCE

There has been plenty of coverage of [women leaders shining](#) during the pandemic—although the *Atlantic* sees it less as a triumph for women than a [failure of strongmen](#). I don't think effective leadership is limited to either sex, but I grow more convinced every year that injecting women's voices into conversations will lead to better solutions. Progress won't be immediate, but I do think a better gender balance in both political and business leadership will be a lasting aftereffect of COVID-19.

Take a look at the major companies—from Coca-Cola and Hershey to Walmart and Merck—that have signed on to [Paradigm for Parity](#), a movement aimed at achieving full gender parity in corporate leadership by 2030.

PLUGGING THE HOLES

For years, we have been hearing that “a rising tide lifts all boats,” meaning that strong economies benefit all. The pandemic has laid bare the fallacies behind this argument, uncovering the deep inequities that allowed many of us to stay safely tucked away at home while lower-paid “essential workers” risked their lives to keep us stocked in groceries and our infrastructures running.

“Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

I think we are “seeing” our fellow citizens far more clearly than we did before the pandemic. We are more aware of the men and women (and teens) who don’t have the luxury to shelter in place. We are more aware of our community business owners and those they employ—and of the difficulties they face as they fight to stay in operation. We are more aware, too, of the [clear correlation](#) between race and income and both economic and physical survival—a situation that [promises to worsen](#).



London Black Lives Matter peaceful protest from Vauxhall Bridge to Westminster

Awareness is not a solution. But it is a critical step in that direction. As James Baldwin put it, “Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

I have never been accused of unwarranted optimism—if anything, I’m a bit of a cynic. And yet, I am seeing signs everywhere that people are hungering for a societal reset. And, like so many others, I am looking for ways to contribute.

I would love to hear your ideas and solutions.

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"We before me." It's not a novel concept. Might the silver lining of these times be a return to a sense of true community and shared responsibility?

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