

# WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR **BLACK** **PROFESSIONALS** TO WORK IN THE **WHITE-WASHED** FASHION INDUSTRY

BY: CORINNE DORSEY

**A**s the world begins to see the lack of diversity within almost every industry, many black professionals are speaking out against the lack of diversity within the fashion spectrum. Black people who work in the fashion industry are feeling more anxious and hyper aware of the often overlooked underrepresentation in their respected fields. These issues have been brewing for centuries as racism has pervaded in this country. Though, this particular time is giving many black fashion professionals an opportunity to speak about their experiences in the often white washed spectrum of fashion.

"We've already got a black girl" or "It's not our creative vision" are only a short list of the reused excuses on why there is a lack of representation in the fashion industry. It is no longer acceptable to allow the fashion industry to capitalize off Black culture without welcoming Black creatives the opportunity to grow within the industry. Professionals in the fashion industry are tired of the systematic disenfranchisement that exists within the fashion industry, for reasons associated with social obstacles, colorism, bias, and blatant racism. Whether it is on set of a

magazine cover shoot or a casting for a runway show, black professionals are tired of being undervalued and tokenized.

Many Black professionals are choosing to speak up due to the frustration of seeing publications and brands that have consistently excluded Black people, choosing to share announcements of support with the Black Lives Matter movement. There was never solidarity within these brands when Black professionals were applying for jobs, requesting promotions, or even pointing out the lack of inclusivity. These messages mean nothing as brands only reflect performative activism instead of truly addressing the long-standing practices that have excluded Black people in the fashion industry for years. To learn more about how Black professionals have been affected in different areas of the fashion industry, Charley Magazine has compiled a list of quotes from Black professionals on how they have been affected from working in the often white-washed fashion industry.



My biggest frustration in the industry is the lack of hairstylists that know how to care for Black hair. Within seven months I've lost ten inches of my hair. And if I could change one thing instantly, it would be that hairstylists would be required to know how to do Black hair. I'm tired of seeing my hair on the floor after each job."

—Anok Yai, model

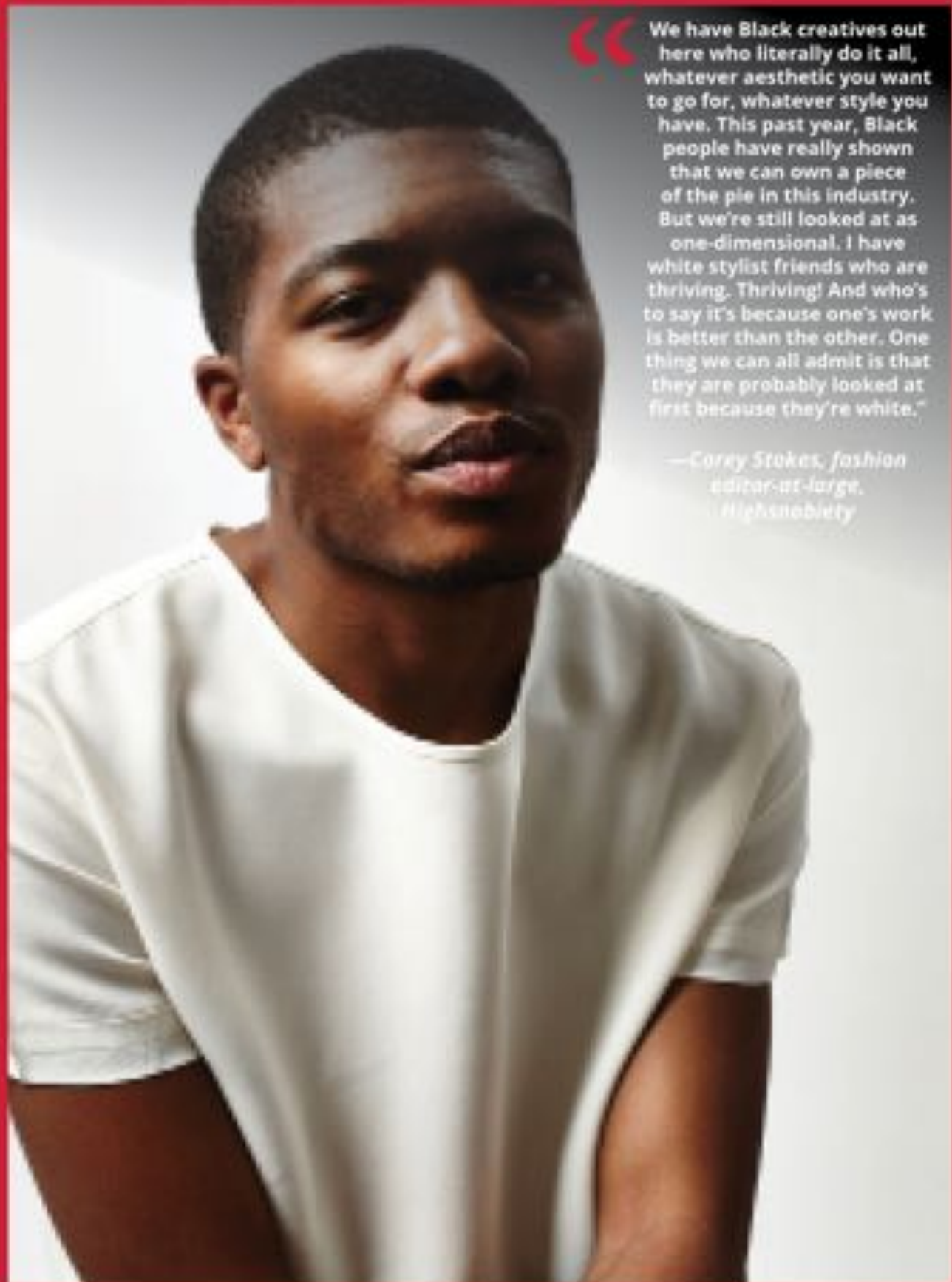




“We work in a really superficial industry. Part of the reason why I had an easy time getting a job is because I’m tall and skinny. Maybe that helped “balance” me being a black girl. It’s all about the optics.”

—*Chrissy Rutherford, senior digital fashion editor, Harper’s Bazaar*





« We have Black creatives out here who literally do it all, whatever aesthetic you want to go for, whatever style you have. This past year, Black people have really shown that we can own a piece of the pie in this industry. But we're still looked at as one-dimensional. I have white stylist friends who are thriving. Thriving! And who's to say it's because one's work is better than the other. One thing we can all admit is that they are probably looked at first because they're white. »

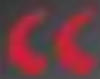
—Cory Stokes, *fashion editor-at-large, Highsnobiety*





It's not about blackness, it's about context and storytelling, and understanding who we are, where we come from and how broad the diaspora is. Ad campaigns featuring Black people sometimes miss the mark because they truly do not understand the foundation. If you don't know that putting a Black child in a sweatshirt that says 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' is triggering, then you are still losing, no matter how inclusive you're trying to be."

—Recho Omondi, designer



There are so many brands on Instagram that claim they want to be part of the diversity movement. And then you scroll down past two months and there is no diversity. That's when one has to ask: Are these brands really about diversity, or are they jumping on the bandwagon because right now, 'diversity' is extremely lucrative. Especially after witnessing the Fenty [Beauty] phenomenon."

—Rajni Jacques, fashion director, *Teen Vogue* and *Allure*

