



Rants and Randomness with Luvvie Ajayi

#BuyBlack - BONUS Episode 4

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Yo, my peoples welcome to Rants and Randomness. I'm Luvvie Ajayi, your side-eyed sorceress and this is my podcast where I talk about things I'm loving, I interview people. From time to time. I bring you a bonus episode where I do a deep dive into a particular topic, and on this episode, I want to talk about the importance of buying black.

So this episode is really inspired by a turn of events where, um, [Gucci](#) started selling a sweater that was black. It was a turtleneck sweater that was black, but you pulled it over your face. It had red lips around where your lips are like a little cutout. And then [Prada](#) did a doll that had these big red lips and it was brown.

Ultimately these two products were commercial blackface, and a lot of folks were like, what do you mean? Well, black face historically is when white people performed to each other to just ridicule blackness. They'd paint their faces black and use red exaggerated lips. And it was, they created a character called Sambo. So blackface was historically created to denigrate black people.

For major fashion brands to release products that look like blackface, that essentially create caricatures and then sell it. Them trying to profit off blackface in 2019 is maddening. Okay. Maddening. It just feels like sensitivity went out the door, sense went out the door, and it's Black History Month!

You would think any of this stuff wouldn't happen, especially now, but it's happening. On top of that was this really crazy photo shoot that came out actually last year, but people just kind of paid attention where a model was dropped in the middle of an African village while wearing a white wedding dress and surrounded by kids and adults from the village in huts.

And it's this weird dusk position of extreme wealth and poverty that is being made to look like it's supposed to be a beautiful scene, but really what it is, it's exploitative of the people in that city, in that village, and it's exploitative of just the African image. So all of that and the hoopla around it and the backlash really brings us to the point where we have to start thinking of, "What are we doing besides being upset about it? What are we doing when we, when we participate in these things like what happens after the outrage dies down? What do we do with this anger?"

It really had me thinking about how we participate in capitalism, right? The thing is, we opt in by default. We opt in by default because of the world that we live in, a lot of the clothes that we're wearing, it's probably created by somebody who's not being compensated

properly in a cut, in a third world country, it's probably been created with by people who are being exploited.

The things we wear every day, the things that we buy every day. It's really hard in this world to live a really purely ethical life because we don't have the option. We're not even given the option to be nice capitalists. Inherently, capitalism itself is just made to create wealth for some, for a small amount, and then everybody else poor.

So in thinking about this and in the instances where a brand that we've helped validate it's coolness like Gucci and Prada and [Moncler](#), that they can disappoint us, they can exploit us, and it's still hard to break away from them.

Like, I know people are still going to be buying Gucci. I know black folks are still going to buy Gucci. I know we still gonna wear Prada and. It's not like I can necessarily tell us to stop wearing it because I know for a fact there's no high horse for me to climb on, cause I know that I probably rock other brands that have done problematic things in the past.

What I'm wondering is what black luxury brands, can we start validating in this way? Because money talks, right? And people love the prestige of Gucci. How do we get a black owned fashion brand to this level? Now, I know this answer is not easy, and I know it's multilayered, and I know there's pipelines that we're locked out of and all types of things that we lack control of, but how do we essentially prioritize the black economy and black fashion designers in a world that really loves the Gucci's and Louis Vuitton's and the Pradas?

For me, I always think. Okay. What next? What do we do with this outrage? How do we turn these incidences of racism and fashion and business and tech into chances for us to help the black economy? Like I just have a whole lot of questions, but one thing that I try to do, and I've tried to do for a long time, is to wear and consume as much black content as possible.

So what I mean is, if I can, I will wear a black designer when I'm going to an event. I will do my best to, you know, be able to tag them because I'm like, you know what? I'm just small in this giant pot of influencers and invisible people and celebrities. But if I can do my part by making sure that I'm supporting a black brand, maybe somebody else will actively try to support them, too.

Like, so my signature lip that I wear most of the time is a red velvet matte lip that is by [Magnolia Makeup](#), and it's a black owned brand out of New Orleans. I also love wearing [Lip Bar](#), which is owned by [Melissa Butler](#). She's out of Detroit. There's also [Mented Cosmetics](#). When I'm stepping on a stage, when I'm doing some type of press, I love wearing one of their lips. So when somebody asks me, what are you wearing? I can actually amplify their name.

Shoes that I wear. [Belya Shop](#), which is out of Senegal sometimes I love their Oxfords in this Ankara fabric made Oxfords. And I also think about the fact that, okay, so being insistent on trying to wear as much black designers as possible. What does it actively do?

Well, here's the thing is people love peer pressure. Honestly, we are very simple creatures in that if somebody who'd be like says something's cool or nice or dope, we're like. Okay, I'll try

it. So we need to start peer pressure ourselves by being like, you know, telling our friends and saying, Hey, I wore this thing. It was really cool.

And that is a really easy way because word of mouth marketing is still the best marketing. It is still the best marketing and one that, that's one of the things that we can do ourselves. Seeking out black businesses. It might take you some more time, as in, you know, let's say you want to wear a black designer's suit. Before you probably didn't have access to figuring out who was, but now we have social media. Social media makes it all easier.

The other day, I actually did a series of stories where I was like, I'm gonna...Mike. Funny enough, Killer Mike did in his Netflix show [Trigger Warning](#) in the first episode, he spent three days insistent on just spending in the black economy, and when he talked about how hard it was to do it, let me realize, yes, just wearing a black designer's clothes is not going to be the only fix this issue. But I think once we start doing this more intentionally, what it does is it makes it that much easier for black designers and black business people to succeed. It makes it better and more possible for it to actually grow.

So. People talk about Black History Month, about, you know, the Harriet Tubman's and MLK. I always think that Black History Month is not just about talking about the historical figures. I think it's a trigger for us to do better because if we're black 24/7, BHM let's us double down on our blackness, right?

So it's - February kicks off. You need to start being like, okay, what am I actively doing right now to help the diaspora? What am I doing that is concrete, right? That can actually give back to people? Money talks. So, which is why we have to actually actively be intentional about supporting black businesses.

Now with this controversy around Gucci and Prada and their black face wear that even though they always apologize for stuff like this. Whoa. My God, we're so sorry. One, I always wonder like, who was in the room, who was like, yo, this is terrible. Who didn't speak up because they weren't empowered to speak up?

Who was in the room through these channels? Not one person was like, yo, you guys, um. This is not going to go well. Anyway, so everyone's like, well, boycott Gucci, boycott Prada. I have a little - I struggle with the use of the calls for boycott because I feel like when you ask somebody to boycott, you're telling them, stop this thing that you do all the time and instantly it gets people into a mode of defensiveness where they're like, you want me to stop doing this thing that I love?

It is a mental blockage that becomes hard, right? I think it's more about us asking people to divest. What divest means is when you spend more money elsewhere, you'll spend less money in the places that don't help us. So divest your money into black businesses. I'm not going to call for you to boycott Gucci, which again, you can, but divest your money into black businesses, which means go spend your money with the black luxury brands like [LaQuan Smith](#), [Fe Noel](#), [Pyer Moss](#), because when you do that, you will have less money to buy Gucci.

So it's not me telling you stop buying Gucci's me saying, buy more Pyer Moss. And if you do that, you'll just naturally spend less with Gucci. So I think we should actually consider asking more people to divest. If you're spending more money with the [Pantora Bridals](#) the it's way collections, [Lanre Da Silva Ajayi](#), you will spend less money with a [Louis Vuitton](#), you'll spend less money with -- there's so many. There's so many luxury brands.

What's funny is I'm not a huge luxury brand consumer. One, because I'm cheap, but two, because I really. Yes. Mostly because I'm cheap and also I just don't, I honestly realize that it's not like the quality is not really what I'm paying for. After a certain point, after you spend \$500 on a bag, the difference between a \$500 bag and a \$3,000 bag sometimes is nominal.

Really, a lot of times you're paying for just the label. I mean, then there's a [Birkin bag](#), which 15 like \$15,000 that one, sure, they basically skinned a cow and just dried it up and put it on a bag, and it's like super soft leather, but still I'm cheap, so I'm not a huge consumer of luxury.

However, I respect the people who love luxury brands. You've got the money, spend it, go buy your \$3,000 bag. But if you can buy this \$3,000 bag with somebody who like [B. Marie Style](#) as opposed to [YSL](#) I think that gives back, and I think that goes further because according to Killer Mike's piece, he was saying that money stays in the black community for six hours.

Where in other communities, like Asian communities, it stays sometimes like 25 days. So, when we understand how much we define cool, we really understand our power and we have so much power. They say the black spending powers, what \$1.1 trillion a year. If we made the attempt to use some of those dollars more of those dollars in black businesses, we could really move the needle.

And because black people determine what is cool and we set trends, us validating black designers can actually swiftly change the game for the black economy. We do that by being intentional about seeking out and wearing black designers where we will be seen to the store to work, to church on red carpets, on stages at events.

We buy black, we wear black. I mean, companies like [Tracy Reese](#), [Chen Burkett](#), Christian Lauren, Catula, Euforay, [Hideoki Bespoke](#). I mean, there's so many. We just sometimes have to look for them, right? We have to look for them. A lot of times they don't have the capacity to have the big marketing campaign that lets you know who they are, but that's why it's important for us who have platforms, who people see every day. We can help in this way.

I'll be doing a list of black shoe makers, next black bag makers, just black every, all black, everything. You can also follow an Instagram account called a shoppe black, S-H-O-P-P-E B-L-A-C-K. They have a website. They constantly tag and amplify black businesses. And that way you will know, "okay, I need to go buy a bathing suit." Well, you can go with Andrea Yama, or you can go with [Bfyne](#). There's so many options.

But one thing that I do understand also in this process is we are often harder on black businesses than we are on others. We expect them to be cheap, deliver on time, 24/7 customer service, then give high quality work, and then we don't want to pay for it. Even

though we'll pay for somebody else because of their name recognition, but a black brand that shows up correctly, we will question and I think we need to stop doing that, too.

I think about, you know, sometimes how people will go blast a black brand on social because, "Oh my God, um, I sent my order in two weeks ago, but I haven't received my order." And then they'll go off on Instagram. Or on Facebook or on Twitter about this black business. And then we find out they never even reached out to this black business and given them the chance to rectify whatever the problem is.

We have to give each other more grace in this piece. Of course, I'm saying people have to come correct in business. However, when certain mistakes are made, I would say you should go to the business first before you decide to blast them on social. Ultimately, for us, when black businesses fail, unfortunately it makes it harder for other black businesses because people extrapolate that failure to everybody else's failure.

Oh my God, I can't support that black nail salon because I went to one and they didn't do my nails right. And you're like, okay, but that wasn't, this isn't that one that did not do your nails right. So whether we know we don't intentionally or not, I think we need to, honestly, be pro-black in that we give each other the grace.

We need to give each other the room to make mistakes, but we also, as business people, as entrepreneurs, just prioritize excellence. So all of it works hand in hand. The other thing that I do to move stuff like this forward is, I don't charge small businesses for amplifying their brand and shouting them out.

Whenever y'all see me tagging somebody, whether it's a pair of shoes, whether it's lotion, whether it's glasses, and I tag them in my social, and it's a small brand, I'm not getting paid to do that. I'm doing that cause I love it. And I think for those of us who are platforms, we should consider doing that more often.

And actually I think a lot of people do do it. I'm not an exception to the rule. A lot of people like Blake do it. [Signed Blake](#). So we do that for the love because people are actively doing great things, and if we want to do something outside of be outraged whenever these bigger brands show us that they love our money and not our culture, I think it's a moment. It's always a moment for us to pause and be like, you know what? What can we do - personally do - to actively fix this? But I'm also very clear that our spending money in black economy does not fix the whole problem. Right? Me buying more, more shoes with black designers does not change the systematic downgrade like the systematic cheating of us and what we do and how we're locked out of certain systems and certain rooms.

All I'm saying is it just makes it that much easier for that black company to be able to scale and be able to compete in a world that is constantly trying to make sure that you don't get the access that you need.

So. Yeah, man, I will be sending out a Buy Black List. Every time I send out a newsletter, I call my newsletter The Love Letter.

I just naturally love to create a list of things I'm loving and buying and wearing. So what I'm up to, what I'm thinking about is in there. But I also want to show some love to some black brands that I can vouch for some black candlemakers like [LIT Brooklyn](#) and [Freres Branchiaux](#) and [Southern Elegance](#).

Black shoe makers like [Tori Soudan](#) and Belya Shop. Black bag makers like Coola Designs and, de Lassi,e LLC. So, yeah, y'all, I really want us to commit to -not just Black History Month doing this -but in general, I want us to commit to amplifying black brands to capacity building and helping black business owners grow and to give grace to black businesses when they make mistakes that are not just egregious and terrible.

Now I want us to continue to validate each other's work because if we don't do it, nobody else will. We don't have to always look to these mainstream brands for the clothes that we need for even our laundry detergent doesn't have to be from Target anymore. There's a brand in Chicago called the [True Brand](#), and they do laundry.

If we can figure out ways in our lives to infuse, to give more money to black folks, we are, we'll be better for it, I think. You know, even the jewelry that I wear was created not from a random designer at Macy's. I went to a woman of color whose name is Pretti to have my jewelry made. And my fiance got my ring made by her.

So even outside of just the black economy, if we can give more money to people of color, I think we'd be better for it.

So, yeah, man, I do that. And follow me on social. I'm @Luvvie. Let me know what you think about this. Let me know how you buy black. Let me know if there's any other resources and directories that people can use to find where they can buy and consume and hire more black folks.

I think a couple of people are working on directories like [Harlem's Fashion Row](#). [Brandice Daniel](#) is on Instagram. You can follow her. B-R-A-N-D-I-C-E, Daniel, D-A-N-I-E-L.

And yeah, man, let's keep doing this and beyond Black History Month, let's be super black, 24/7, 365 and if you're not black, you can still support the black economy and buy products from black business owners and amplify them.

So I think it is a full responsibility of all of us to do this. So, alright. So if you have any questions for me, feel free to email me at loveyrants@gmail.com. And follow me all over social media @Luvvie. I love to hear your thoughts and if you have any other topics on a bonus episode that you want me to cover, feel free to let me know.

See you on the next episode.

Links and Resources:

[Magnolia Makeup](#)

[Lip Bar](#)

[Melissa Butler](#)

[Mented Cosmetics](#)

[Belya Shop](#)

[LaQuan Smith](#)
[Fe Noel](#)
[Pyer Moss](#)
[Pantora Bridals](#)
[Lanre Da Silva Ajayi](#)
[B. Marie Style](#)
[Tracy Reese](#)
[Chen Burkett](#)
[Hideoki Bespoke](#)
[Bfyne](#)
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