

POWER LIST: Here are the 28 most outstanding people of color transforming the sneaker industry today, from designers to influencers



- The sneaker industry is intrinsically bound to a variety of cultural influences, but that cultural impact is rarely seen beyond brands' outward messaging or campaigns.
 - For example, the sneaker industry is known to have roots in [Black culture](#), but this does not correlate with the number of Black people in the industry as designers and executives.
 - But the pendulum is starting to swing.
 - Business Insider identified 28 outstanding people of color who are transforming the sneaker industry today.
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The sneaker industry has never existed in a silo. From designers to consumers, the field is intrinsically bound to an array of cultural influences.

First and foremost, the sneaker community, as we know it today, has its roots in [Black culture](#). Icons like Michael Jordan and Run DMC helped define the industry, while celebrities like Travis Scott and Beyonce give the industry relevance and excitement today.

Of course, the sneaker world is also a cultural melting pot that includes a wide range of communities. [Chitose Abe's Japan-based Sacai](#) label has become a major global brand since its 1999 founding, for example, and has become a major name in streetwear, featuring collaborations with Nike and Beats by Dre.

But when it comes to people of color in the sneaker industry, such cultural influences are rarely seen beyond a brand's outward messaging or campaigns. As the New York Times [previously reported](#), fewer than 4.5% of the 1,700 Adidas employees at the Portland, Oregon, campus identified as Black, according to internal employment figures from the summer of 2019. In contrast, marketing campaigns and celebrity partnerships from [Adidas](#) are known to prominently feature artists and athletes of color, such as Kanye West and James Harden.

[Adidas](#), [Nike](#), and [Under Armour](#) have all recently acknowledged their part in maintaining a workplace lacking in diversity and inclusion. But more importantly, the sneaker industry has committed to changes.

Nike raised VP-level representation for underrepresented groups to 21% in 2019. Adidas announced a commitment to filling a [minimum of 30%](#) of new US Adidas and Reebok positions with Black and Latinx people. Meanwhile, the [African American Footwear Forum](#) (AAFF), an organization that works to address and solve diversity issues in the footwear industry, is looking to take stock of the industry's diversity and opportunity for Black people.

"People of Color are the heartbeat of the sneaker industry and epicenter of sneaker culture. They are our consumers, employees,

athletes, and influencers," said Kris Wright, Nike's VP of global footwear for men's sport and lifestyle. "In order for brands to engage, understand and resonate with the communities they serve, their employee community must reflect those same POC communities so that those making product can relate and qualify their work with that of what our consumers would want to purchase."

Business Insider identified 28 outstanding people of color who are transforming the sneaker industry today. After a nomination process, final inclusion in the list was based on multiple factors, including an individual's impact on the sneaker industry as a whole or on the impact an individual has had on a company in which he or she has worked. The final list was determined through our reporting.

From Nike's VP of global footwear to the founder of a Kenya-based sneaker company, here are the 28 outstanding people of color who are transforming the sneaker industry today

Portia Blunt



New Balance

Company: New Balance

Role: Director of apparel operations

Career highlights: In her role as New Balance's director of apparel operations, Portia Blunt oversees design, innovation, and operations for apparel. In her role, Blunt spearheaded company efforts to highlight Black culture and expression, leading a team of Black designers to launch New Balance's [first-ever Black History Month \(BHM\) product capsule](#). Blunt also helps the brand strategize diversity and inclusion efforts in her role on the New Balance's D&I leadership task force, where she focuses on guiding women and Black people in her brand and in the footwear industry at large.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker industry:

"Ultimately, I believe it is imperative that people of color continue to drive and influence the sneaker industry," Blunt said. "However, that influence and cultivation needs to be reflected in more Black and brown talent in positions of leadership. This is important because as we address the clear deficits with leadership at the executive level, we will start to have a more accurate picture of who the sneaker industry really is. At the end of the day, that progress will validate the value of culture's of color to our industry and will also ultimately honor our contributions to the industry."

Gabriel Maselino



Gabriel Maselino

Company: Nike

Role: Footwear designer

Career highlights: Gabriel Maselino is a self-taught footwear and apparel designer who leveraged a background in graphic design and illustration to start his own consulting group after graduating college. He was recruited in 2012 as a footwear designer at Nike, where he had the chance to design iconic pairs like the 'Greedy' Air Max 95s, the Presto, and the iSPA collection. He also designed the Nike 'Air Max VG-R running shoe, which launches this fall. Maselino said he sees himself as a "problem solver" who aims to continue to use his designs to address the issues that the world faces today.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "It is the unsung cultures, experiences, and learnings of each individual and their respective communities that allow us to look at the world from a different vantage point," said Maselino. "It is those points of view that provide us with a new way to teach, to learn, to adapt, and ultimately, to grow."

Jazeraï Allen-Lord



Jazeraï Allen Lord

Company: True to Size

Role: Creative strategist and sneaker designer

Career highlights: Jazeraï Allen-Lord began her career as a journalist at Complex's KicksonFire. She then went on to make her own products as a designer, launch her own unisex streetwear line, and design her own sneakers with Reebok. Today, Allen-Lord works as a consultant and brand strategist with the team at True to Size, a strategic agency that she co-founded. Allen-Lord was a part of the [team](#) that helped New Balance launch its inaugural Black History Month Collection this year, which was activated with basketball player Kawhi Leonard in Los Angeles in tandem with the Boys & Girls Club of Mar Vista Gardens. Allen-Lord is also a leading member of [The](#)

[African American Footwear Forum](#) (AAFF), an organization that works to address and solve diversity issues in the footwear industry.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "Unlike most of the top line industries like tech, automotive, hospitality, and the like, the sneaker industry has a unique cultural element — the same element that drives sales — and that specific element is rooted in Black culture," said Allen-Lord. "Beyond that, when we look at the talent who is selling the product that drives performance and innovation-driven categories, that talent has historically been, and continues to be, Black. As the creators of the culture and the people who continue to drive it, Black people not only deserve but are owed a seat at the table. Correction: we deserve our own tables, in rooms that we built."

Brandis Russell



Brandis Russell

Company: Converse (Nike)

Role: VP of Global Footwear

Career highlights: Brandis Russell has been at the helm of Converse's product innovation since joining the brand in 2018. She has overseen the launch of the Converse CX, a sustainable footwear line, as well as the launch of the brand's All Star Pro BB basketball shoe.

Russell is also a co-leader of Nike's D&I acceleration task force, which focuses on growing representation, professional development, inclusion, and education within the brand. In her over 15 years with Nike, Russell also led product in Nike's sportswear division and helped launch the "Sneaker Culture for Women" initiative. Russell was named the Black Employee Network (BEN) person of the year in 2014.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "As a Black woman, it is important that I play a role in the sneaker industry because I know that my community has largely been the catalyst for sneaker culture — as consumers, as creators, and as influencers," Russell said. "As a result, it is important that there is diverse representation in this industry, to ensure it reflects the communities that we serve and to ensure we are equal parts creators and leaders in an industry we have shaped and informed."

Alexander-John



Alexander John

Company: Freelance

Role: Designer and artist

Career highlights: Alexander-John is a footwear and fashion designer who has worked in the sneaker and streetwear industries for over a decade. In addition to customizing and engraving footwear, John has designed sneaker collaborations for leading brands and celebrities throughout his career, all while avoiding going in-house at a brand.

The artist, who began customizing sneakers in 2004, has had his work worn by Usher, Chris Brown, Caron Butler, and Drew Gooden, and Busta Rhymes. He has also customized footwear Jay Z, Beyonce,

Emory Jones, Google, Microsoft, and Nickelodeon and has designed exclusive sneakers for [Puma](#), Nike, Adidas, and Reebok. Alexander-John has also designed collaborations for [Foot Locker](#) and has lectured about his journey in the industry.

While his work includes a variety of different styles, from out-of-the-box to more conservative, he says his mantra is always the same: to imbue life into the footwear he creates.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "It's important for people of color to play a role in the sneaker industry because it is heavily driven and inspired by our culture and athleticism," John said. "I have enjoyed being able to go to schools in my community and discuss what I do and how far I've come by staying true to my heritage and offering true stories to the world through design. The excitement in the students' eyes as I stand before them delivering my story is priceless, and I realize at that very moment I represent the thing that our ancestors fought for — the American Dream, also known as freedom."

Navalayo Osembo



Navalayo Osembo

Company: Enda Athletic, Inc.

Role: Co-founder and CEO

Career highlights: Navalayo Osembo is the co-founder and CEO of Enda Athletic, Inc., a performance-focused footwear and apparel brand with products made in Kenya. Osembo originally hails from a town near Eldoret, Kenya, which is known for producing a slew of world-famous long-distance runners. She co-founded Enda, which means "Go" in Swahili, after working in international development and noticing a pattern of Africans playing sports but rarely leading product development.

Enda's two models currently on sale, "Iten," which refers to a popular running region in Kenya and "Lapatet," which means "run" in Kalenjin, a language used by many Kenyan athletes.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "People of color are already playing a big role in the sneaker industry. Their roles just aren't at the ownership or decision-making levels," said Osembo. "Neither are they adequately represented in the design, manufacturing, or distribution processes, which is where the money is. There should be less focus on the role people of color play, because sneaker culture is largely Black culture, and more focus on understanding why we are so underrepresented in critical roles. This forces us to then look at the structural, economic, and social structures that limit people from getting into these roles and then come up with practical multifaceted solutions."

Richard McLeod



Richard McLeod

Company: Foot Locker

Role: VP, Marketing

Career highlights: Richard McLeod joined Foot Locker, Inc. in 2019 as a VP for Footaction, a subsidiary of Foot Locker. He was promoted after 10 months to his current role as Foot Locker's VP of marketing. McLeod also chairs a committee of Foot Locker Diversity & Inclusion Council, which keeps the brand focused on diversity goals. McLeod also helps run Foot Locker's [No 1 Way Design Program](#) with the Pensole Design Academy to encourage budding design talent from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the US.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "I don't think there's a 'sneaker culture' without the Black community — the two are intrinsic to one another," McLeod said. "It is extremely important to have relatable and authentic people of color, at all levels, who fundamentally understand the people and community we are trying to serve."

Shaneika Warden



Shaneika Warden

Company: Under Armour

Role: Senior color design manager

Career highlights: Shaneika Warden's main role at Under Armour is managing what colors are used on the brand's footwear, basketball, and team sports apparel divisions. In this capacity, she has led color selection and strategy for a variety of launches for the brand, including the Run HOVR tech platform, the 2018 Black History Month (BHM) collection, the 2019 NFL combine collection, and the women's HOVR basketball sneaker.

Before landing at Under Armour, Warden spent time working in color design at Nike and REI. At Nike, she worked on multiple BHM

collections and products for stars like Russell Westbrook, Chris Paul, Carmelo Anthony, and Blake Griffin. In addition to her design prowess, Warden also enjoys helping young designers find their place in the industry and sees color design as a way to evoke conversation and tell stories.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "I strongly believe diversity and culture are critical elements required for innovation, progression, problem-solving, and the need for continued relevancy," Warden said. "It's how we continue to better ourselves as human beings. Having a true diverse school of thought represented by people who hail from a variety of backgrounds make for real conversation that brings real solutions."

Eric Wise



Adidas

Company: Adidas

Role: Global VP of product for Adidas Originals

Career highlights: Since joining Adidas in 2016 as director of merchandising for Foot Inc. brands, Eric Wise was promoted multiple times finally landing in his current role in April, where he leads global marketing for Adidas Originals. In addition to his official job at Adidas, Wise has helped shape the company's United Against Racism (UAR) commitments and has worked directly with Adidas' North American President Zion Armstrong in his role as a co-chair and executive sponsor of the brand's US United Against Racism Accountability Council. He is also a member of Adidas' Global Committee to Accelerate Inclusion and Equality and recently helped launch Honoring Black Excellence, a company movement focused on engaging communities with specific activations focused on Black culture.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "It is important for people of color to play a role in the sneaker industry today because sneaker culture has always been influenced, inspired, and authenticated by people of color," Wise said. "We need to give people of color the awareness and visibility to the types of careers the sneaker industry can offer. The more we can give them awareness to opportunities, the better our industry will be."

Je Nay Silva



Je Nay Silva

Company: Sneaker Wellness, HER Collective Sole

Role: Founder of Sneaker Wellness and CEO of HER Collective Sole

Career highlights: Je Nay Silva's involvement in the sneaker industry is focused on the widely unexplored topic of sneaker wellness. Leveraging a background in hospitality management, media, and tech startups, Silva's work focuses on educating women about the relationship between their shoes and their wellness, something she calls "Sneaker Wellness." She spreads her message as the CEO of [HER Collective Sole](#), a resource for foot care and ergonomics. Working at the nexus between design and health, Silva hopes to help sneaker companies and consumers focus on foot health when it comes to designs. Silva recently ran a virtual conference for women of color,

which featured a panel of women discussing their journey in the sneaker industry.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "Being a woman of color and a sneakerhead is a superpower. Being [a] woman of color in sneakers drives you in a way to create more opportunity, to tell the stories, and to connect dots faster for growth that benefit the communities you know need it," Silva said.

Eric "Shake" James



Eric "Shake" James

Company: CLICKS, SNEEX, BLACKMARKET

Role: Owner of three sneaker boutiques

Career highlights: Eric "Shake" James is a Milwaukee-based owner of three sneaker stores. He opened his first store, CLICKS, with musician Darryl McDaniels of Run DMC in 2015 with the help of designer and creative strategist Jazerai Allen-Lord. The store was meant to be a conceptual Adidas boutique and an archive of Run DMC-related items. James later opened SNEEX, another sneaker and apparel store, and is currently preparing to open his third store, BLACKMARKET. In addition to owning and operating these stores in what has been called one of [America's most segregated cities](#), James is also working on launching the JAY Community Center, which will serve a mostly Black neighborhood in Milwaukee. This center will be a place for James' community projects, such as his toy drives and annual [Jam Master Jay Back to School community school supply giveaway](#), to live.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "It's necessary for people of color to have stake and ownership in the decisions made within the senior leadership within organizations because when it comes to sneakers and streetwear, it's us who is dictating the direction of the culture," James said. "The next generation needs the knowledge and education to not only be in the pipeline but have ownership one day as well. We can be more than just a face on a mood board."

Alicia Pinckney



Alicia Pinckney

Company: Timberland

Role: Apparel designer

Career highlights: Alicia Pinckney has worked on a variety of pieces and collaborations for Timberland since started on the apparel team as a designer in 2017. Her designs were featured in the RAEBURN x Timberland collection, which launched in fall of 2018 and was shown at London Fashion Week.

In 2019, she worked on the "Timbs on my Feet," collection that celebrated Timberland's links to hip hop culture. She later shifted her focus to general apparel, focusing on knit and sportswear. Pinckney recently launched The Black Talent in Design and Fashion Fund, a

non-profit that supports Black students in the US pursuing a fashion career. She is also a member of the African American Fashion Forum, Timberland's inclusion and diversity action team, and Timberland's parent company's inclusion network.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "I believe it's important for people of color to play a role in the sneaker industry because the sneaker industry has been built, for years with our culture as the blueprint," Pinckney said. "If the product is designed with Black influence and marketed with Black aesthetic, then naturally Black influence should have a strong presence in the industry, making creative and scalable decisions."

Kris Wright



Kris Knight

Company: Nike

Role: VP global footwear, men's sport lifestyle

Career highlights: As Nike's global footwear, Kris Wright keeps a constant pulse on consumers in the men's sport lifestyle division. The footwear veteran has worked across the Converse, Jordan, and Nike brands, where he has led many high-level collaborations with artists like Virgil Abloh. Wright is [vocal](#) about encouraging young talent of color in his capacity on the advisory board of directors for the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC), which is considered a top HBCU (Historically black colleges and universities) conference.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "People of color are the heartbeat of the sneaker industry and epicenter of sneaker culture. They are our consumers, employees, athletes, and influencers," Wright said. "In order for brands to engage, understand and resonate with the communities they serve, their employee community must reflect those same POC communities so that those making product can relate and qualify their work with that of what our consumers would want to purchase."

D'Wayne Edwards



Pensole

Company: Pensole Design Academy

Role: Founder

Career highlights: When he got his start in the sneaker world in 1989, D'Wayne Edwards [was one of a handful of Black designers in the field](#). He went on to spend 10 years as Nike's footwear design director between 2001 and 2011, where he designed for the Air Jordan brand. To date, Edwards has created over 500 styles for athletes like Derek Jeter, Carmelo Anthony, and Michael Jordan.

In 2010, Edwards started Pensole, a design academy that encourages the next wave of young footwear designers on their path into the industry. Since its founding, Pensole has placed more than 475

graduates in top brands. Edwards is also a driving force behind the African American Footwear Forum (AAFF), an organization that works to address and solve diversity issues in the footwear industry. In 2016, Edwards was awarded the President Volunteer of Service Award by President Barack Obama.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "I am tired of the double standard of my industry spending billions of dollars on Black people to be the face of their companies as if they are trying to make the industry better for us when in fact, our industry does not spend .5% of those same billions to educate us on how we can have a career in this industry," Edwards said. "I pray all of the Black people who currently work in a company take on the responsibility to do what you wish was done for you when you were a teenager, today."

Jasmine Pendergrass



Jasmine Pendergrass

Company: Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America (FDRA)

Role: Director of events and marketing

Career highlights: Jasmine Pendergrass manages events, marketing, and communications for the Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America (FDRA). The FDRA represents over 90% of sales in the entire footwear industry as the largest footwear association in the US. In addition to producing events for the FDRA, Pendergrass was also involved in the creation of the African American Footwear Forum (AAFF), which works to address and solve diversity issues in the footwear industry. She was an integral part of organizing the forum's inaugural event in February of 2019.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "What's important for me is to have people of color occupying all seats, vertically, from top to bottom," Pendergrass said. "We give the sneaker culture so much depth and value; it's proven. It's vital that we have the opportunity to tell our own stories and have a hand in the entire process. We should have a seat at several tables, not just an invite at one within a culture that we heavily influence."

Rodney Pratt



Rodney C. Pratt

Company: Converse (Nike)

Role: VP, general counsel, and corporate secretary

Career highlights: In his capacity as a VP and general counsel, Rodney Pratt is responsible for Converse's global legal strategy. Pratt is also a member of the senior leadership team at Converse and is the founder and executive sponsor of the Converse Diversity Network, [an employee group](#).

In addition to his work at the footwear brand, Pratt regularly speaks about the importance of diversity and inclusion in the footwear and legal spheres. He chairs the workforce development committee, a working group for the Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America

(FDRA), where he is also a member of the board of directors. He is also a member of Nike's Black Community Commitment Task Force, which guides the brand in supporting the Black community.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "Perhaps more than any other industry in the world, the sneaker industry, and the ecosystem of sportswear, streetwear, lifestyle and fashion sustained by it, has been influenced, inspired and authenticated by Black and Brown consumers, athletes, trend-setters, and sneaker connoisseurs," Pratt said. "We need to ensure, with a greater sense of urgency and accountability, that we bridge the sneaker industry representation gap that exists between the block and the boardroom. We have made a lot of progress over the years, and we still have a lot of work to do."

Priscella Shum



Priscella Shum

Company: Reebok

Role: Global design manager

Career highlights: In her 18 years in design and project management, Priscella Shum has helped grow iconic brands, including Reebok, Yeezy, Sean John, and Baby Phat. In her current role at Reebok, Shum is responsible for overseeing collaborations and partnerships. She managed design and production for the Cardi B x Reebok and Reebok by Pyer Moss collections. As an advocate for people of color in the design industry, Shum sees her managerial roles as an opportunity to develop and nurture young, underrepresented talent in the industry.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "I believe it is incredibly important for people of color to play a role in the industry because these are OUR stories," Shum said. "From the expression, to the colors, to each design line, there's a part of our history in every sketch and every concept."

Vladimir Estiverne



Vladimir Estiverne

Company: Foot Locker

Role: VP of strategy, corporate development, and strategic investments

Career highlights: In his role as a VP at Foot Locker, Vladimir Estiverne focuses on corporate development and spearheads investments in early and growth-stage companies for Foot Locker. Estiverne also oversees partnerships and investments with Black-owned businesses and leaders in conjunction with Foot Locker's \$200 million commitment to supporting the Black community. Focused on inspiring future leaders of color in the industry, Estiverne is an executive member of Foot Locker's Black employee resource group, BUILD (Blacks United in Leadership and Development) and sits on

the board of The Opportunity Agenda, a non-profit that addresses social justice issues.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "People of color are a big part of what is driving the industry today. We have, throughout history, been leaders of movements and culture – and sneaker culture is no different, but we are oftentimes not represented in the decision-making spaces," Estiverne said. "We must lift one another as we climb, and through our collective effort, we can truly shape this industry in a way that better serves and supports all of us together. It's our time."

Julia Bond



Julia Bond

Company: Adidas Originals

Role: Assistant designer

Career highlights: Julia Bond is an assistant designer at Adidas, where she creates products for Men's Originals. Bond was only a few months into her full-time designing job at Adidas when she became the face for [activism and change](#) in the company. In June, she wrote an open letter to the company that called out leadership for ignoring what she described as "systemic racism" at the brand. Bond asked for a public apology from Adidas and continues to lead protests at the brand's Oregon headquarters at noon every day in pursuit of a response from the company. In addition to her roles as designer and activist, Bond is a dancer with the [Freshvibe Dance Crew](#).

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "This is an industry that uses Black bodies as mannequins and Black culture for profit, but does not always celebrate or amplify Black minds within the space," Bond said. "Black erasure is a real thing, and our industry can do better if it amplifies black voices and perspectives in the space. It's so necessary and long overdue. This industry would be nothing without Blackness, and I see that some people are recognizing that. Black people need to be in this industry because at its core, it is us."

Derrick Register



StockX

Company: StockX

Role: VP of operations

Career highlights: Though Derrick Register only recently joined the team at StockX, a leading resale platform for sneaker and streetwear, the VP has already accumulated a series of accomplishments in his role heading up operations at the Detroit-based company. In addition to overseeing more than 350 hires across the company, Register led the openings for an Atlanta authentication center and a New York seller drop-off location and is in the process of opening three more authentication centers. Beyond his role at StockX, Register aims to empower future leaders through his work as a tutor for the SOAR Detroit Reading and Mentor Program and as a board member for the

Southeast Michigan Omega Foundation, which offers college scholarships to students in the Metro Detroit area.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "Like so many other areas of society, the sneaker industry has long reproduced systemic inequalities of representation and opportunity," Register said. "Historically, people of color have not received due credit for their contributions to the space, which include some of the most innovative ideas and biggest trends shaping the sneaker industry. For that reason, and many others, it remains imperative to me, and to the broader team at StockX, that we afford people of color opportunities to directly impact the space."

Vicky Vuong



Vicky Vuong

Company: [@cestlavic](https://twitter.com/cestlavic)

Role: Sneaker customizer/influencer

Career highlights: Vicky Vuong is a sneaker customizer who has been bringing her designs to life on a variety of different sneaker silhouettes for the past eight years. Vuong's passion for design began as a hobby, but in 2019, she turned her talents into a viable business. She also helps customers customize their own shoes. Her [Instagram page](#), which currently has over 11,000 followers, showcases her intricate designs. Her [YouTube](#) channel offers tutorials and resources for people looking to customize their own shoes.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker industry:

"Sneakers tell a story of where someone has been, where they want to go. I think people of color have a very rich story to share, whether it is personal experience or history passed down through generations," Vuong said. "Being an Asian woman, I am underrepresented in more than one facet of life, but especially in the sneaker industry. However, this underrepresentation pushes me to work harder, it means my work must speak louder, and my designs must stand above the rest."

Rashone Bryant



Rashone Bryant

Company: Sneaker Bar Detroit

Role: "The Sneaker Box" podcast host

Career highlights: Rashone Bryant uses his platform as a writer and content creator at Sneaker Bar Detroit to shed light on issues and nuances in the sneaker and streetwear industries.

Known as Afrikan Caesar, Bryant is the host of Sneaker Bar Detroit's ["The Sneaker Box,"](#) a podcast and radio show focused on sneaker culture. Via his platform, Bryant has touched on everything in the industry, from the resale market to its roots in Black culture. Outside of his role as host, Bryant has traveled and lectured about the

sneaker community and has focused on speaking on behalf of people of color in the industry.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "We need people of color in the sneaker industry because people of color are the ones moving the needle in both sneaker culture and in the sneaker community," Bryant said. "We need people of color in the industry, not just for the sake of diversity in numbers, but also for diversity of thought and experience. This breeds creative balance, which broadens the industry's ability to relate and engage in a more authentic way with their consumer base."

Clyde Edwards



Clyde Edwards

Company: Puma, North America

Role: Senior marketing manager

Career highlights: Clyde Edwards got his start in the sneaker industry in 2007, when he launched his sneaker unboxing YouTube channel and blog, "Inside The Sneakerbox." This was before the boom of [shoetubing](#) happened a few years later.

Edwards went on to work as the GM of merchandising for luxury boutiques Mr. R Sport and Addict in Miami, Florida, where he got the opportunity to oversee a [concept collaboration](#) with Lacoste in the 2016 Miami Open. He joined Puma in 2016, where he was recently named the captain of #REFORM. This team, which focuses on social responsibility issues related to equality and racism, gives him a platform to lead Puma's first employee resource group for diversity and inclusion.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "If Black culture is a driving force behind the athletes and signature shoes, past heroes and retros, modern-day entertainers and the hype; then there must be Black and brown people at the forefront of product concept, story design, creation, marketing, advertising and retail," said Edwards. "I think it's imperative for us to hold executive roles and board seats to also break the cycle of systemic racism and not 'having a seat at the table.'"

Caroline Lew-Wolf



Adidas

Company: Adidas

Role: VP of business development

Career highlights: Caroline Lew-Wolf oversees Adidas' strategy and business development teams for North America. She came to Adidas in 2016 after an over 20-year career in the consumer products and sneaker industries. Passionate about advocating for women and minorities, Lew-Wolf is a member of Adidas' United Against Racism (UAR) accountability council, working with a group of employees, athletes, and artists to ensure accountability and change from within the company. Lew-Wolf is also an advisor on Adidas' employee resource group focused on engaging the Asian community.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker industry: "It is important for people of color to play a role in the sneaker industry today because sneakers are a celebration and reflection of inner-city communities and culture," Lew-Wolf said. "People of color should not only play a role, but also lead the innovation, evolution, and growth of the industry."

James Hardaway



James Hardaway

Company: Reebok

Role: Global senior product manager

Career highlights: As one of the longest-tenured Reebok employees, James Hardaway is known by his colleagues at the brand as "The OG." The Reebok veteran, who currently serves as global senior product

manager, has been with the brand for 28 years. During his time at Reebok, Hardaway has become known for pioneering strategic partnerships between the brand and music artists. In the 1990s, he helped Reebok become one of the first footwear brands to partner with a music artist when he launched Reebok's collaboration with rap group The Hot Boys. This kicked off a series of music-focused partnerships with other artists such as Common, 50 Cent, Pharrell, Nelly, and Kendrick Lamar.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "The influence that people of color have had and continue to have on the sneaker industry is vast and immeasurable," Hardaway said. "For decades, they have been a driving force in sneaker culture, setting the fashion trends that are adopted by the masses. The industry simply would not exist without the contributions of people of color. But there is still work to be done. The industry has an obligation to reciprocate by ensuring that people of color permeate and thrive in the industry at all levels."

Jaconna Jacobs



Jaconna Jacobs

Company: Adidas/Everything Boisterous

Role: Creative director at Everything Boisterous and assistant product manager at Adidas

Career highlights: Jaconna Jacobs got her start in the footwear industry in 2015, when she started [Everything Boisterous](#), a blog meant to highlight unapologetically creative individuals in the streetwear space, many of whom are people of color. Through this platform, Jacobs has interviewed influential figures in the sneaker and streetwear worlds such as Adidas collaborator Na-Kel Smith, Sonny Digital, DJ Kid, and more. She also spent time as a contributor for [Vashtie.com](#), the blog platform for designer, filmmaker, and DJ Vashtie Kola, the [first woman to design](#) an Air Jordan sneaker. In

addition to running her Everything Boisterous, Jacobs currently works as an assistant product manager at Adidas.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "Without people of color, sneakers would not be cool. Without people of color, streetwear wouldn't even be called streetwear," Jacobs said. "When I say people of color, I really mean Black people. We are the most powerful consumer as well as the most influential consumer, so to play a role in the industry that we helped build up is only natural. This is OUR culture and we deserve ownership."

Sean Williams



Sean Williams

Company: Obsessive Sneaker Disorder

Role: Educator, curator

Career highlights: A longtime sneaker enthusiast, Sean Williams joined [Obsessive Sneaker Disorder](#) (OSD) as a partner when the live, weekly talk show and podcast was launched by his friend Dee Wells in 2007.

Today, OSD is regarded as one of the first and longest-running sneaker culture talk shows and podcasts. In his role, Williams aims to educate and inspire the next generation of sneakerheads and people looking to forge a career in the industry. Williams also teaches OSD's "SOLEcial Studies" program, which helps prepare people for a career in footwear, and was a co-curator of a New York City-based apparel and sneaker [exhibit](#) in 2019.

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "It is very important for people of color, and women just as importantly, to play a role in the present and future of the sneaker industry because people of color and women represent experiences that have been taken for granted for too long," Williams said. "If the experiences and professional approach of people of color and women are given more top billing and leadership opportunities, I'm sure it would lead to better product all the way around."

Jason Mayden



Jason Mayden

Company: Super Heroic

Role: Former CEO and co-founder

Career highlights: Jason Mayden is the former co-founder and CEO of [Super Heroic](#), a footwear line made for inspiring kids. Though the DTC startup announced it was [shutting down](#) its website and operations in February, the brand previously nabbed a [\\$3 million investment from Foot Locker](#) for a total of [\\$10 million](#) in funding. Via his brand, Mayden launched a performance sneaker meant for activity on a playground and launched [an exclusive TMBLR sneaker](#) with Nickelodeon. Before founding Super Heroic, Mayden worked at Nike for 13 years as a senior global design director and as the director of innovation for the digital sport division. During this time, he designed

footwear for athletes like Michael Jordan and created the [best-selling](#) Nike Air Monarch. Mayden often [speaks](#) publicly about his journey in the industry and about the [importance of empowering kids](#).

Why people of color are important to the sneaker

industry: "I believe it is imperative to honor the contributions of BIPOC operators, creators, and leaders in our industry because we serve as the catalyst for relevancy, authenticity, and soul," Mayden said. "Without us, the industry would significantly lack meaning and connectivity to the youth. From our pain, we birth innovation. From our innovation, we spark revolutions. From our revolutions, we change the world."