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Travis D. Boyce
San Jose State University, travis.boyce@sjsu.edu

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TRAVIS D. BOYCE¹
San Jose State University

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1. The author wishes to thank Mr Corin Lindsay for his time. This interview was conducted on 31 October 2020 and was revised and updated on 1 November 2020. The interviewee has agreed to the use of the image.

INTERVIEW SYNOPSIS

The following interview features Corin Lindsay, co-founder of Corin DeMarco; a fashion line that markets premium quality sportswear apparel featuring Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

INTERVIEW

Travis D. Boyce: *Why Corin DeMarco? What inspired you and your business partner to create a fashion line that markets premium quality sportswear apparel featuring Historically Black Colleges and Universities?*

Corin Lindsay: The inspiration behind the creation of Corin DeMarco began with a simple yet unwavering joint admiration of celebrating the tradition, legacy and excellence of our nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities. We set out to create a platform that not only appreciates where we are and how far we’ve come, but we wanted to put an emphasis on WHY we were started to begin with, and we wanted to share it OUR way.

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Figure 1: Courtesy of Corin DeMarco.

That's why you'll find some of the original names of our storied institutions, dating back to the first half of the eighteenth century, carefully and meticulously stitched on the front of our sweatshirts. Again, our brand's sole purpose is to celebrate our story of excellence in academia that began nearly 25 years before the emancipation of slaves.

Moreover, I can remember browsing through an HBCU bookstore one weekend while celebrating a family member's graduation. I was looking to grab something simple yet stylish and of quality to wear. I realized some of the major brands and schools designed 'iron-on' sweatshirts suffered from low quality and made matters worse; they dominated the store. Well, little did I know, my soon to be business partner, who attended both an HBCU and an Ivy League school, was experiencing the same dilemma 12,000 miles away in Mississippi. He saw a difference in the quality and respect of the schools' appreciation for their beginnings and decided to take matters into his own hands, literally and purchased a high-quality sweatshirt and varsity letters and sewed them onto the shirt, with no tailoring experience... lol, all by himself. The sweater was a hit at his homecoming and took off on social media sites.

I felt that none of the merchandise that I had come across embodied the rich history and heritage that my parents, and grandparents both HBCU graduates, had instilled in me when it comes to celebrating our fine institutions of higher learning. Wanting to fill that void of timeless, high-quality apparel that was also stylish and tailored is how Corin DeMarco came about to create

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products that speak to us and those who may not yet know and understand our story. A premium-quality, 100 per cent French terry crewneck, signifying sincere respect for both the wearer and the institution.

TDB: *What makes Corin DeMarco different from your competitors, such as Support Black Colleges and HillFlint?*

CL: The common denominator amongst us all, make no mistake about it, is our continued appreciation and celebration of Black excellence, provided by and demanded by HBCUs. However, what humbly sets Corin DeMarco apart from its competitors is our meticulous approach to detail and relentless commitment to adequately sourcing the highest quality fabrics and embroideries, albeit here in the United States or across the globe. It is evident in our product that we have a deep respect for not only detail but, most importantly, the missions of the nation's historically Black colleges and universities. Our designs, along with our message, are stylish yet timeless and classic. We understand our customers because we, too, share their heritage and culture.

TDB: *Black Lives Matter seeks to 'create space for Black imagination and innovation and centring Black joy' to improve our daily lives. In what ways do you see fashion (particularly, messaging on clothing) getting across this message?*

CL: Now, more than ever, fashion activism has become a vehicle for driving home messages intended to create social and political change, often as a sign of protest for those who are oppressed or, in many cases, empowered.

When it comes to the Black Lives Matter movement, people have been able to use fashion to further enhance a message that has long been in place since the horrific days of slavery and bondage. Further proof that there is nothing new about the message that Black lives do matter and should matter. Just take a look at one of our sweatshirts that honours the legacy and heritage of Spelman College. It was back in the 1880s that then Oil magnate John D. Rockefeller and his wife, Laura Spelman, donated funds to the predominantly African American school for women. Spelman, herself, was the product of an abolitionist family who, arguably, believed that Black lives mattered way before it became popular to do so.

Fast forward to today and our current times of unrest, we've witnessed entire NBA teams and players donning t-shirts that read, 'I Can't Breathe', and 'Arrest the Cops that killed Breonna Taylor'. Even Nascar's Bubba Wallace, unashamedly, painting his race car with BLM's message and words.

With Corin DeMarco, we hope that our customers will feel empowered by wearing our product with pride, knowing these schools produced the likes of Thurgood Marshall, Dr Martin Luther King Jr and Oprah Winfrey. The message that we support wholeheartedly couldn't be any more explicit about what can happen when Black Lives Matter!

TDB: *The Black Lives Matter is indeed a youth movement and has expanded to include the support of various issues that impact the Black community. One of the most visible issues is the overwhelming support of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. What does it mean in this current political moment (the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement) to witness young people (this includes this nation's best athletes) consider HBCUs as their top choices?*

CL: Historically speaking, HBCUs have always been a part of the conversation in Black households. There was an even more significant resurgence more

than 30 years ago when 'A Different World', a spin-off 'The Cosby Show' and Spike Lee's film, 'School Daze', hit the big screen, bringing to light the pride and prestige that came along with attending our fine institutions. Whether students chose to attend or not, the options for us to succeed at HBCUs, where our parents and grandparents attended, have always been there. But the current climate most certainly means we are producing the next generation of leaders and stewards of change.

When it comes to athletes, there was a time when HBCUs produced an incredible number of pro athletes before players were recruited and picked up by predominantly White institutions. Look at the legendary football history of Grambling State University and Jackson State University, where NFL Hall of Famer Deion Sanders just signed on as head coach (JSU in an effort to recruit more collegiate athletes). The move by Sanders could most certainly be considered a result of the Black Lives Matter movement's resurgence sparked by the recent deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

From sit-ins at Fisk, Shaw, North Carolina A&T and Tougaloo College, HBCUs have always been the top choice for many of our most significant leaders, athletes, musicians and professionals. Change has always been a youth movement when it comes to the plight of the African American race here in the United States.

TDB: *Oklahoma City Thunder point guard and fellow North Carolina native Chris Paul has centred his activism on the recognition and preservation of HBCUs. Also, he has been captured wearing your brand (Winston Salem State University and North Carolina Central University sweatshirts). What does it mean that Corin Demarco is viewed as both a fashion influencer and a symbol of Black self-determination?*

CL: It means that we are moving in the right direction as a brand. Our mission is to embody the finest attributes of our heritage: urbanity, creativity and optimism. And to do so without compromising who we are as a people. We strive to preserve and champion the refined aesthetics and standards found in our traditions and cultural legacy. Lastly, we seek to inspire our community (and inform others) by presenting Black excellence as the standard, not the exception.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Travis D. Boyce, Ph.D., is department chair and associate professor of African American Studies at San Jose State University (United States). His areas of research interest are contemporary African American history and popular culture.

Contact: Department of African American Studies, San Jose State University, Washington Square Hall 216 A, One Washington Square, San Jose, CA 95192-0108, USA.

E-mail: Travis.Boyce@sjsu.edu

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