

Starbucks Response to Arrest of Two Men

By Jarrah K. Al-Buainain, J.D. Candidate 2019 | April 24, 2018

A Philadelphia [Starbucks](#) manager called the police after having a disagreement with two patrons waiting for a friend. The episode unfolded after one of the men was refused access to the restroom since neither of the pair made a purchase. After the two men were asked to leave and refused to do so, they were arrested on charges of disturbance and trespassing. The men were freed later that night and the charges against them were dropped.

The two men, Rashon Nelson and Donte Robinson, are entrepreneurs that were at the Starbucks that afternoon to discuss a project which they had apparently been working on for [months](#). The men claimed that the project was in its final stages and could potentially “change [their] lives.”

The arrest of the two men, both black, was captured on video and generated millions of views within days. The video reveals the two men being placed in handcuffs after being approached by police. Also appearing in the video is the friend they were waiting for, who is white, questioning the police’s intentions for the arrest, asking, “Is it because they’re black?”

Shortly after the video went viral, the hashtag “#Boycottstarbucks” started trending on Twitter. Shortly after that, Howard Shultz, Starbucks’s Executive Chairman, said that he felt “[ashamed](#),” adding that he “had no doubt in [his] mind” that the police were called because the men involved were black. Starbucks’s new CEO, Kevin Johnson, also called the ordeal “[reprehensible](#)” and arranged to fly to Philadelphia to personally apologize to the two men.

In the aftermath of the incident, Starbucks announced that it will be closing more than 8,000 of its locations in order to train some 175,000 of its employees on racial bias. The closure will occur on May 29th and according to Schultz “will cost millions of dollars,” which he nonetheless views as “an investment in our people and community.”

Notwithstanding the appropriateness of Starbucks’s swift response, which many figures in the PR world applauded, one has to question, was the hideous event, at its core, really a [Starbucks problem](#)? Whether or not Starbucks’s response was sincere or merely a product of excellent crisis management, the company undoubtedly made the right call by going above and beyond just issuing a statement. With the plethora of instances of people of color being wrongfully arrested, many of which are captured on video, is it really that shocking that something like this could happen at a Starbucks? Black people shouldn’t be arrested for being black. The Starbucks arrests should serve as a wakeup call that a lot more than training Starbucks employees needs to be done in order to curtail these sadly not so unfamiliar occurrences.

