

Then, now, next: a brief history of the Race in the Marketplace (RIM) research network

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide a timeline and account of the development of the Race in the Marketplace (RIM) research network as it nears its 10th anniversary in 2027. Written by the network's three co-founders, it complements the Guest Editors' introduction to the special issue, *Historical Perspectives on RIM*, in the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*.

Design/methodology/approach – The RIM co-founders present a firsthand narrative of the organization's development, highlighting the collaborative efforts that have shaped its inception and growth.

Findings – The paper presents a visual timeline and narrative highlighting the RIM network's key accomplishments and academic contributions.

Originality/value – In a global political climate where critical research on race is under attack, this piece reaffirms the network's longstanding intellectual commitment: to advance understanding of race and markets in ways that support social justice.

Keywords Marketing history, Consumption history, History of marketing thought, History of marketing ideas, Race in the marketplace

Paper type Extended editorial

Introduction

The Race in the Marketplace (RIM) research network is celebrating its ten-year anniversary – supposedly. Why “supposedly”? Because it is difficult to say when it truly began. Was it during our first discussions in June or July 2015, the initial concept note drafted the following October, the decision on the name in January 2016, the first emails inviting board members in April 2016, the launch of our first Call for Applications in October 2016 or our first in-person Research Forum in Washington DC in June 2017? Or should we accept that these dates are largely symbolic, given that RIM did not emerge from a single founding moment but through a series of steps that formalized an already existing domain of publications, collaborations and conversations (many of which continue beyond the network itself). Naming the network did not create the work, but it marked a moment of consolidation and envisioning, one that now warrants both celebration and reflection.

Is ten years enough to speak of history? In institutional terms, it is a short span. Compared to the Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing (CHARM), founded in 1983, RIM is still young. Yet ten years is sufficient to reflect on the conditions that made the



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network possible and to consider what may lie ahead. At the same time, even as we try to resist self-promotion, we remain aware that, as [Michel-Rolph Trouillot \(1995\)](#) famously argued, power is never absent from historical narration and in many instances, what matters is less what history is than how it *works*. We write this short account with that insight in mind: aware that we may simplify, select or amplify certain moments, while striving for reflexivity. Our aim is not to establish a definitive origin story, but to avoid, as [Trouillot \(1995\)](#) put it, “silencing”: the network’s formation, the field it helped shape and the intellectual commitments that have animated it from the start.

Here, we trace RIM’s first decade by situating its emergence, identifying successive phases and reflecting on the conditions that shaped its development as a collective project committed to bringing about more (racially) equitable marketplaces. Accordingly, we present RIM’s 10-year development in five broad phases:

- (1) its roots (pre-2000–2015);
- (2) its foundation (2015–2017);
- (3) its development through crossing critical boundaries (2017–2019);
- (4) a period of solidarity and theoretical deepening (2020–2022); and
- (5) institutional collaboration (2022–2025).

These phases are somewhat arbitrary and may give a misleading impression of linear progress, as they obscure overlaps, detours and setbacks. Nevertheless, they offer a useful overview of the network’s development, grounding what has been achieved and, we hope, inspiring future work in this and related areas.

Pre-2000–2015: pre-RIM foundations

Scholarly foundations of research on race in the marketplace

The formalization of the RIM network in 2017 did not create the study of RIM. Rather, the field reflects an intellectual tradition sustained by scholars who pursued questions the marketing discipline was slow to acknowledge. Throughout much of marketing’s history, mainstream research ignored the relevance of race to marketplace dynamics ([Burton, 2009](#); [Davis, 2018](#); [Pittman Claytor, 2019](#)), despite evidence to the contrary. Against this backdrop, early scholars advanced work that challenged the field’s implicit assumptions. An exhaustive overview of early scholars on race and the marketplace is well beyond the scope of this article and we acknowledge that the intellectual and practical foundations of this field were also built by many across geographies, languages, institutions and generations whose names are absent from formal records. Their invisibility is itself a product of the racialized dynamics that we examine in this work and we encourage future research to take this seriously. Here, we highlight a few examples that have helped shape the contours of RIM research, both through their scholarly impact and through their personal connection to those who built the RIM Research Network.

In the late 1950s – early 1960s, economist Marcus [Alexis \(1959, 1962\)](#) used his analyses of “racial differences” in consumption patterns to argue that Black consumers constituted a distinct, deserving and consequential market. His work challenged racist advertising logics and reframed marketing practice as inseparable from questions of recognition and economic inclusion (see [Ibrahim, 2017](#)). As a business Professor at Northwestern in the 1990s, he served as an informal mentor to two marketing doctoral students, Sonya Grier and Geraldine “Gerri” Rosa Henderson. In parallel, marketing Professor Theodore (Ted) Spratlen advanced the study of “minority markets” in the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on the challenges of Black business owners, the need for positive targeted marketing strategies and the importance of

community economic development (e.g. [Spratlen, 1973](#)). Both Alexis and Spratlen, as early scholars, engaged in field building as founding members of the Caucus of Black Economists in 1969 ([Caucus of Black Economists, 1970](#)). Although their approaches to race and markets may not fully align with how many RIM scholars conceptualize these issues today, their work nevertheless provided essential foundations for challenging the long-standing invisibility of racial dynamics in marketing.

Jerome D. Williams extended this line of research by focusing on “marketplace discrimination,” establishing it as a measurable reality with significant economic and legal implications. His work across cultures, countries and market domains, including retail, service, financial, public health and housing, highlighted the importance and value of interdisciplinary and international approaches to the study of RIM issues. His service on the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* editorial board further positioned him among the earliest Black-marketing scholars to exert ongoing influence on race-focused editorial conversations within the marketing field.

Jerome Williams’ main coauthor was Geraldine “Gerri” Rosa Henderson, whose scholarship centered on marginalized consumers and their marketplace experiences. Her portfolio of journal publications, commentaries, classroom cases and the 2016 book *Consumer Equality: Race and the American Marketplace* further expanded the contours of RIM scholarship, particularly in contexts of customer discrimination ([Henderson et al., 2016](#)). Williams and Henderson mentored an impressive new cohort of scholars whose work would eventually coalesce into RIM, including the cofounders and authors of this piece.

Together, these scholars exemplified sustained scholarly engagement with issues of race in marketplace contexts and served as formative mentors, shaping the intellectual foundations of the field. Their engaged scholarship also reflected how institution-building aimed at supporting race-focused scholars and scholarship is a crucial component of advancing RIM research. RIM, therefore, represents not merely the formation of a scholarly network but a collective recognition that understanding the role of RIM requires sustained and concerted attention to race as a structuring force in consumer marketplace opportunities, experiences and outcomes, including in the academy ([Grier et al., 2019](#)).

The pre-RIM context of scholarship on race in the marketplace

In the mid-2010’s, scholarship in the marketing field underwent a gradual shift from emphasizing cognitive models of consumer behavior and decision-making toward perspectives stressing identity, culture, emotion and social context. Methodological approaches broadened beyond laboratory experiments to include qualitative, interpretive and modeling traditions ([Wang et al., 2015](#)). Institutional developments during this period also reshaped the scholarly landscape. For instance, the PhD Project was founded in 1994 (see [Briley and Grier, 1997](#)) and gained significant momentum in the mid-2010s as efforts intensified to increase the number of underrepresented minorities in business doctoral programs and to diversify business school faculties. The PhD Project – which has recently been targeted for elimination – became one of the first sustained, field-wide initiatives aimed at expanding racial diversity within academic marketing.

Despite these shifts, race-related marketplace research remained underdeveloped in marketing. Evidence from the RIM Repository indicates that key research topics during this period included shopping discrimination, consumer response to targeted marketing and consumer identity, often built on theoretical lenses such as social identity and consumer distinctiveness, emphasizing attitude change and persuasion rather than structural analysis of markets (see [Race in the Marketplace, 2020](#)). Accordingly, methods emphasized surveys, experiments and content analyses of representation and race was most often operationalized

as a consumer characteristic (e.g. Asian vs Black vs Hispanic vs non-Hispanic White) and many articles documented differences in responses without theorizing the specific role of race and markets. Moreover, studies addressing RIM topics appeared more frequently in specialty, communication, social science and public health journals than in generalist marketing outlets.

Quantitative analyses have documented the relative underdevelopment of race-focused scholarship. Davis (2018) identified only 75 scholarly books and articles addressing marketing and racism over a 48-year period (1969–2017). Pittman Claytor (2019) documented a decline in publications focused on Black consumers in highly ranked marketing journals since the 1970s and observed that much of the existing work treated race superficially or inconsistently with lived marketplace realities. The limited research breadth and documented structural constraints were central motivations for the collective network-building efforts of RIM.

2015 to 2017: the creation of the RIM research network

Over time, RIM scholarship began to shift toward explicit structural analyses of racism, racialization and marketplace justice. Conceptual, empirical and review articles increasingly began to name race as central to concerns of the field and signaled growing recognition that race constituted a foundational dimension of marketplace research.

It was within this context that the RIM Research Network was created. Conceived as an international and transdisciplinary scholarly community, RIM sought to bring together researchers examining race and intersecting social constructs, including class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and migration across global marketplaces. We developed a name for the initiative, designed a logo, created a logic model and assembled a founding advisory board consisting of RIM scholars from across disciplines around the globe:

- Naya Armendarez-Jones, University of Texas at Austin (Geography), USA
- Samuel Bonsu, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (Marketing), Ghana
- Janet Borgerson, City University of London (Marketing), UK and Rochester Institute of Technology (Philosophy), USA
- Donnel Briley, University of Sydney (Marketing), Australia
- David Crockett, University of South Carolina (Marketing), USA
- Anthony Kwame Harrison, Virginia Tech (Sociology), USA
- Gerri Henderson, Loyola University Chicago (Marketing), USA
- Ronald Hill, Villanova University (Marketing), USA
- Naa Oyo A. Kwate, Rutgers University (Human Ecology and Africana Studies), USA
- Vanessa Perry, Georges Washington University (Marketing), USA
- Jonathan Schroeder, Rochester Institute of Technology (Communication), USA
- Paul Schor, Université Paris-Diderot (History), France
- Frederick Wherry, Yale University (Sociology), USA
- Jerome Williams, Rutgers University (Marketing), USA

By naming “race in the marketplace” as a collective scholarly project, RIM coalesced scattered lines of inquiry into a visible and coordinated research agenda.

The inaugural forum (2017)

RIM formally launched in 2017 with the first RIM research forum at American University's Kogod School of Business. Designed to lay the groundwork for a global research network, the Forum – sponsored by universities such as American University, Université Paris-Dauphine, Rutgers University and the University of Texas at Austin as well as academic institutions including the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) and the Association for Consumer Research – brought together 46 scholars, practitioners and scholar activists from around the world, representing fields from marketing and sociology to public health, anthropology and media studies. Rather than following a traditional academic format, the gathering centered on dialogue, care and collaboration (see [Figure 1](#): 2017 RIM Research Forum Program Cover).

The Forum opened with a documentary on Hennessy's targeted alcohol marketing and moved into conversations about the social construction of race, markets, intersectionality and the challenges of conducting/publishing race-focused work. A visit to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture grounded these discussions in lived histories of inequality and resistance, while practices like yoga and a “come as you are” ethos reminded participants to bring their full selves to this work. By the end, the Forum had established what we now recognize as the “RIM approach”: a way of convening rooted in interdisciplinarity, inclusion and deep attentiveness to the lived realities of studying race and markets, transforming RIM from a single event into an intellectual community.

2017: Reimagining the marketplace

The Forum was also where we began shaping the theoretical foundations of the network. Early conversations about what “race in the marketplace” means – and how markets themselves should be understood – later informed an article in *Consumer Markets and Consumption* (see [Grier et al., 2019](#)). In that piece, we argue that race should not be treated as a simple demographic category or business opportunity, as it often is in marketing research. Instead, race must be understood as a sociopolitical force coconstructed with markets, one that requires critical, intersectional, interdisciplinary and international approaches (the RIM pillars) that make power visible and draw on fields where such analysis is well-established. And it is precisely out of this commitment that RIM emerged.

2017–2019: Crossing critical boundaries

During the 2017 Research Forum, it became clear that the network would need to address a number of boundary issues tied to its ambition to be interdisciplinary, international, intersectional and critical, our key tenets. Studying race and markets required engaging with different academic traditions, national contexts and intersecting forms of power, while also remaining attentive to how power shaped discussions within the network itself. As one keynote speaker noted, boundary work therefore had to be central to how the RIM Network was conceptualized, if it was to avoid turning into “turf wars.” In the years that followed, the network developed several initiatives to respond to these challenges.

First, one key initiative was the book *Race in the Marketplace: Crossing Critical Boundaries*, conceived as a collective scholarly resource bringing together critical, interdisciplinary, intersectional and international perspectives on the emerging field of RIM (see [Johnson et al., 2019](#)). Its 16 chapters examine a wide range of cases – from mortgage lending in the USA and video blogging in the UK to hospitals in France and skin-lightening creams in Nigeria and India – demonstrating how race and markets mutually shape one another across contexts, disciplines and methods. The book has since been recognized as a foundational contribution to the field. It is used in several academic programs (including



RACE IN THE MARKETPLACE RESEARCH FORUM

May 30-June 1, 2017

American University

4400 Massachusetts Ave NW,
Washington, DC 20016, USA

Forum Objectives: To develop a solid understanding of RIM across domains and lay the foundation for a transdisciplinary research network.

AGENDA OVERVIEW

Date		Location
Tue May 30	10:00am – 12:30pm – (Optional) Visit NMAAHC	American University 4400 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20016, USA
	2:00pm – 2:30pm – Check-in	
	2:30pm – 3:00pm – Session 0: Welcome & Forum Overview	
	3:30 pm – 4:30pm – Session 1: Informal Networking Activity	
	5:00pm – 7:00pm – Session 2: Film Screening on Market Inclusion and Q&A	
Wed May 31	7:00 pm– 8:30pm – Drinks & Hors d’Œuvres	
	9:00am – 10:45am – Session 3: Why Are We Here?	
	10:45am – 11:00am – Break	
	11:00am – 12:30pm – Session 4: Deeper Dive – Research Speed Networking	
	12:45pm – 2:00pm – Lunch	
	2:15pm – 3:45pm – Session 5: Building an Interdisciplinary Approach to RIM	
	3:45pm – 4:00pm – Break	
Thurs June 1	4:00pm – 5:30pm – Session 6: Conceptualizing the Domain of RIM	
	7:00pm – 10:00pm – RIM Dinner	Mulebone, DC
	09:00am – 10:10am – Session 7: RIM Network Strategic Planning	
	10:10am – 10:25am – Break	
	10:25am – 11:15am – Session 7: RIM Network Strategic Planning (Cont.)	
	11:15am – 11:30am – Brown Bag: Debrief, Summary and Next Steps	
	1:00pm (Optional) Visit NMAAHC	

Figure 1. 2017 RIM Research Forum Program Cover

American University, Mount Holyoke College and Virginia Tech), featured in a “Author Meets Critics” session in *Advertising and Society Quarterly* (Harrison et al., 2020) and presented at numerous institutions and international conferences (e.g. IV Encontro Cultura e Consumo/4th Meeting on Culture and Consumption, São Paulo, Brazil, in 2021). In the wake of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, Palgrave Macmillan invited us to make the book open access; we agreed and its subsequent free online release greatly expanded its reach. In 2022, it received the AMA–EBSCO *Distinguished Winner Award* for Responsible Research in Marketing – an honor rarely awarded to edited volumes – highlighting its significance for the discipline.

Second, these reflections were further developed at the second *RIM Research Forum*. Sponsored by Université Paris-Dauphine, Rutgers University, American University, Marquette University and the MSI, the forum was held in Paris in June 2019 and was designed to deepen dialogue and exchange. While around 50 scholars participated in 2017, attendance more than doubled in Paris, with 100 participants contributing through paper presentations, poster sessions and artistic work (the latter being highlighted by the simultaneous launch of a special issue in the French art-based journal *Dysfunction*, Harrison and Miles, 2019). The forum led to the publication of two special issues in subsequent years: one in the *Journal of Marketing Management* on racial dynamics in marketing theory and practice (see Thomas et al., 2020) and another in the *Journal of Consumer Affairs* examining race and racism in consumer access to markets (see Wherry and Perry, 2021).

Third, the Paris forum also sought to encourage active collaboration rather than passive participation. To support this aim, a *photo-dialogue project*, sponsored by the *Independent Social Research Foundation*, was organized ahead of the conference, inviting participants to reflect visually on race and markets in the Parisian context.

Bringing together scholars, practitioners and activists, the project explored how race is experienced, represented and contested in everyday market settings. The methodological foundations of this initiative were later discussed in an article published in *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, which examined how visual methods – particularly photography – can generate dialogue and support theorizing on race and markets (see Sobande et al., 2021a). Building on this work, the network also coordinated a special collection for the *Independent Social Research Foundation Bulletin* (Issue XXIII), titled *Race and Markets*, featuring short contributions that use photography and other visual approaches to examine racial dynamics in market contexts (see Sobande et al., 2021b).

Finally, we organized a track at the 2019 Transformative Consumer Research Conference to clarify how race and racism operate in markets. In that track, we outlined key principles of Critical Race Theory for marketplace research. We later developed this work in an article published in the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, using artificial intelligence-driven facial recognition as an example of how supposedly neutral technologies can reproduce racial hierarchies (see Poole et al., 2021). The article argues that addressing persistent race-related problems in the marketplace requires a shift toward historically grounded, system-level and justice-oriented analysis of identities and experiences. Published during a period of intensified attention to race, the piece quickly became one of the most cited articles on race in the discipline (and beyond) and received the prestigious Thomas C. Kinnear Award for its significant contribution to understanding marketing and public policy.

In addition, RIM has collaborated across countries and cultures and engaged in an online collaborative panel discussion with marketing scholars in Brazil, a special session at the Marketing and Public Policy Conference in Washington, D.C. and panels at the American Marketing Association Summer Educators Conference in Chicago, IL and the European Sociological Association Midterm Conference in Prague, Czechia. These engagements

reinforce and reflect RIM's mission to advance knowledge on race and the marketplace at a global scale.

2020–2022: Crisis as catalyst – solidarity and theoretical deepening

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which claimed thousands of lives worldwide and amid the nearly simultaneous Black Lives Matter protests, the RIM network gradually deepened its engagement with more theoretical and solidarity-based work.

Theoretical deepening

First, in a commentary published in the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, [Crockett and Grier \(2021\)](#) examined the intersection of RIM and COVID-19. They highlighted how, despite early claims that “we are all in this together,” the pandemic exposed and intensified long-standing racial disparities in public health – exacerbated by decades of racialized fiscal austerity. Their piece called for more policy-oriented scholarship that documents and theorizes the many ways marketplace actors contribute to and reinforce racial inequality.

Second, in an article published in 2023 in the *International Journal of Advertising* ([Thomas et al., 2020](#)), we further conceptualize racial dynamics within advertising. Written in the post-racial reckoning context (May–June 2020), when many brands and advertisers publicly committed to reassessing their relationship to race and racism, the article urges advertising research to undertake a similar reflective process – specifically, to deepen analyses of racial dynamics in the field by developing a more robust understanding of its varied “racial aesthetics”.

Third, in an article published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* ([Grier et al., 2024](#)), we offer a guide for conducting rigorous research on race and markets. We clarify why and how race matters for marketing scholarship and propose a framework that organizes existing research across three interconnected levels: the *macro* level, which examines the mutual constitution of markets and race; the *micro* level, which focuses on individual consumer experiences within racialized market contexts; and the *meso* level, which analyzes how social movements reinforce or challenge market racialization. We conclude by using this framework to outline future research directions, with particular attention to processes of racialization and marketization.

Together, these contributions play a crucial role in consolidating the theoretical foundations of RIM scholarship. They help clarify core concepts, map the complexity of racialized market processes and guide researchers toward more systematic and critical approaches to studying race in marketing.

G.E.R.R.I symposium (2021 and 2023)

In parallel with these advances in theoretical work, we continued to develop organizational efforts rooted in solidarity. On June 23, 2021, the RIM community came together virtually for the first-ever G.E.R.R.I Symposium. Created alongside the G.E.R.R.I. Junior Scholar Award to honor and sustain the legacy of Geraldine “Gerri” Henderson– a foundational mentor, visionary thinker and dear friend whose rare combination of world-class scholarship and profound commitment to helping others helped shape RIM from its inception. Because Gerri often emphasized that research on RIM was too frequently “devalued, under cited and trivialized,” the Symposium and Junior Scholar Award were designed to support the next generation of equity centered scholars; the inaugural award recognized Noémi Michel (then at the University of Geneva) and John N. Robinson III (then at Washington University in St. Louis). The 2023 G.E.R.R.I. symposium further advanced Gerri’s passion for mentorship by introducing the G.E.R.R.I. Scholar Mentor Award, which honors intentional, collaborative

scholarship between mentors and mentees; the first recipients were Benet DeBerry Spence with her then mentee (now UIC colleague) Lez Trujillo Torres and Vanessa Perry (The George Washington University) with her then mentee Nicole Davis (University of Georgia). The momentum generated by these virtual gatherings underscored the vital importance of interpersonal connection within the network, paving the way – once global health restrictions eased – for RIM to transition from online academic exchanges to intentional in-person convenings aimed at revitalizing the community’s internal bonds.

2022–2025: institutional collaboration

The RIM Research Network has received institutional support from several organizations over the years, with two partners playing particularly central roles. With Virginia Tech, RIM established a memorandum of understanding to collaborate on RIM-related events in exchange for institutional support. In addition, American University provided crucial backing by funding dedicated administrative support. These key partnerships enabled us to further our mission to foster a collaborative research community dedicated to innovatively advancing knowledge and critically understanding the role of race in global markets.

2022 RIM re-union

Due to lingering COVID-19 concerns, RIM’s third biennial forum was postponed to June 2022 and reimagined from a full-scale research conference into a more intimate gathering of prior participants in RIM conferences, events and publications. Designed to reaffirm collective commitment to advancing critical research on race and markets, this “mini” forum, titled the 2022 RIM Re-Union, drew inspiration from the structure and spirit of African-American family reunion traditions and was held in Arlington, VA, from June 27–28 with a diverse set of attendees. The program featured two plenary sessions, one focused on race and retail markets and the other on racial equity in higher education, with the remaining time devoted to reconnecting, collective visioning and creatively charting future directions. Continuing RIM’s commitment to critical, practice-engaged scholarship, the retail markets session included a panel of scholars and practitioners (among them Sephora’s Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Ms George-Axelle Broussillon Matschinga) focused on the theoretical and practical implications of retail racism, while the higher education plenary used a case-based format to facilitate open dialogue on systemic challenges, drawing on insights from faculty and administrators affiliated with partner institution Virginia Tech. The Re-Union’s emphasis on collective visioning ultimately laid the groundwork for a more formal assessment of RIM’s future, prompting the leadership team to seek dedicated space to clarify the network’s mission and refine its governance structures going forward.

Planning for the future: 2023 RIM in Riva

RIM held a strategic planning workshop from July 10–13, 2023, at the Steger Center in Switzerland, facilitated through the collaboration with Virginia Tech and attended by members of the leadership team, active community members and a trained facilitator. The workshop focused on refining RIM’s mission, governance and expectations for future growth while also nurturing the network’s communal spirit. Known as the “RIM in Riva Strategy Retreat,” the gathering helped clarify RIM’s mission and reinforced what it means to be part of the community, setting the stage for an expanded emphasis on its international pillar. Indeed, as [Davis and Sauber \(2026\)](#) note, while research on race and markets expanded sharply following the 2020 COVID-19/“racial reckoning” era, particularly in the USA and Europe and often led by RIM Network scholars, work in other contexts including Brazil,

South Africa and other multicultural settings, has grown more modestly, leaving significant scope for further RIM-related scholarship.

Global dialogue series + stairway to South Africa

Following the Riva meeting, it was decided to launch the RIM Global Dialogue Series as a critical transdisciplinary platform bringing together scholars and practitioners from around the world to examine how race shapes global market dynamics. The inaugural talk, featuring Francesca Sobande in conversation with Sonya Grier about [Sobande's \(2024\)](#) book (*Big Brands Are Watching You: Marketing Social Justice and Digital Culture*), exemplified this aim by exploring the fraught relationship between corporate culture, digital media and social justice. Next, the Stairway to South Africa initiative emerged as a subset of the Global Dialogue Series, designed as a set of virtual, group-based activities that prepared the community for the 2025 RIM Forum by deepening understanding of race and markets in the South African context. Organized around a structured "step" format, the series combined short readings, films and scholarly lectures on topics such as jazz, advertising and secondary education, alongside conversations with authors and filmmakers on racial classification, democratic transitions and consumer dynamics. Together, this phase of virtual engagement and thematic preparation served as a precursor to RIM's most ambitious global convening, enabling the community to move thoughtfully from distributed dialogue to an in-person gathering.

2025 RIM research forum

The RIM Network held its 2025 Research Forum in Cape Town, South Africa, in January 2025. This global, multidisciplinary gathering brought together scholars, practitioners and thought leaders to deepen understanding of race in markets. Organized around the theme "Past in Present – Pathways to the Future," the Forum explored how historical racial dynamics continue to shape contemporary markets and future possibilities. The program included research papers, panels, posters, films and artistic contributions, reflecting RIM's commitment to inclusive and creative forms of knowledge exchange. Experiential activities further deepened engagement, including a visit to the District Six Museum (which highlighted histories of displacement and resistance) and a closing dinner celebrating local Cape Malay culture (see [Grier et al., 2025](#) for a detailed account of the conference). The forum was organized in connection with the present special issue of the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing (JHRM)*, which originated from a collaboration between RIM and the CHARM international group of marketing history scholars at Duke University (USA) in June 2023. The Cape Town Forum and the JHRM special issue represent RIM's ongoing commitment to examine race and markets from international perspectives ([Grier et al., 2019](#); [Johnson et al., 2019](#); [Thomas et al., 2023](#)).

Conclusion

Over its first decade, the RIM Research Network has evolved from an amorphous idea into a robust, international and transdisciplinary community (see [Figure 2](#): key milestones). Its development is rooted in a long scholarly lineage – from the early economic analyses of Marcus Alexis to the transformative scholarship of Geraldine "Gerri" Rosa Henderson and Jerome Williams – that challenged the historical invisibility of race in marketing research. By formalizing these legacies of race-related inquiry into a coordinated research domain, RIM is establishing race as a foundational dimension of marketing scholarship.

As we look back, we do so with a profound sense of humility, recognizing that the work of building an international, interdisciplinary, intersectional and critical community is an

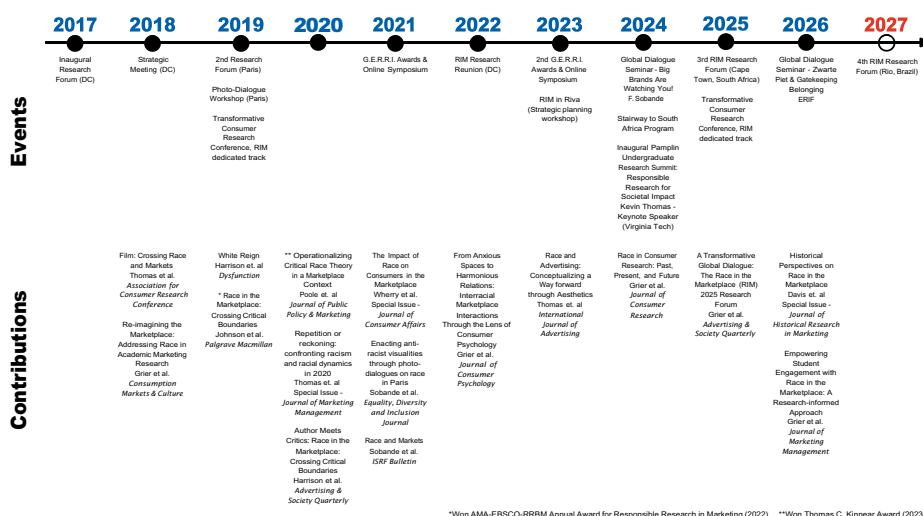


Figure 2. Key milestones of the race in the market research network (2017–2027)

Source: (Content) Sonya Grier, Guillaume Johnson and Kevin Thomas; (Design) Amelia McAfee

ongoing practice rather than a static destination. We are constantly learning how to better center critical perspectives that challenge market hegemonies while ensuring our global reach remains truly inclusive of voices and geographies outside the traditional Western academy. By intentionally weaving together insights from across disciplines and honoring the complex intersections of identity, we strive to remain reflexive about the power dynamics inherent in knowledge production. Perhaps most importantly, we remain mindful of our commitment to fostering spaces where scholars do not have to leave their identities at the door. From the quiet moments of breathwork and connection shared at the inaugural forum in Washington, DC, to the vibrant exchanges in Cape Town, we have sought to build a community where the person is as valued as the publication. By celebrating the uniqueness of each individual and encouraging everyone to bring their “whole selves,” we hope to move beyond the narrow confines of professional networking toward a model of radical care and collective belonging.

Looking ahead, RIM’s 10-year anniversary will culminate with the next Forum, scheduled to take place in Brazil in 2027. This milestone is accompanied by heightened needs for the Network and renewed urgency for RIM-related scholarship in global contexts (see Davis and Sauber, 2026). In a global political climate where critical research on race is not only undervalued but often under direct attack – faced with legislative bans, the dismantling of DEI initiatives and institutional retrenchment – our mission to foster actionable insights and advance social justice through a critical understanding of race and markets has never been more vital.

Acknowledgements

As the race in the marketplace (RIM) research network nears its tenth anniversary, the authors sincerely thank everyone who has made this project possible through conferences, workshops, collaborations and shared moments of learning and connection. This network is a testament to your intellectual engagement, energy, generosity and collective spirit. The authors also

acknowledge the courage and vision of those who paved the way and laid the foundation for this community. The authors look forward to the next decade of advancing this work together.

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