

‘It’s a broken window, it’s not a life.’ Damaged businesses choose to amplify Black Lives Matter movement

Damaged businesses are choosing to amplify the Black Lives Matter movement.

By [Janelle Nanos](#) Globe Staff, Updated June 3, 2020, 8:37 p.m.



TJ and Hadley Douglas, owners of the Urban Grape, filled orders in their South End store. JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF

At 6 on Monday morning, Hadley Douglas awoke to a text from a friend. It was the news that she’d been dreading: Urban Grape, the South End storefront that Douglas owns with her husband, TJ, had had its window smashed in as thieves took advantage of the chaos

that erupted after Sunday's peaceful protest.

The hours and days that followed tested the Douglasses emotionally and were yet another significant setback after months of financial strain. But the Douglasses, and other independent business owners in the city who suffered looting damage, sided with the protesters voicing outrage over police brutality.

When the text message about the looting came, Hadley Douglas, who is white, stayed home with their kids while TJ, who is Black, drove from their home to the South End to check on the store. Then her phone rang: Someone had tripped the store's alarm, and the representative from the security company needed a password to turn it off. Her mind went blank — they usually called TJ first — and the dispatcher told her she would have to call the police.

She panicked, the fear and frustration that have fueled the protests of the past week forcing a tightening in her chest.

"You can't call the police," she sobbed. Her husband, she explained, "is Black and in a broken-into liquor store the night after protesting and rioting. I need you to hear me when I say you can't send the police," she told the dispatcher. "If you call them, you have to understand what you're condemning him to."

The dispatcher was sobbing, too — she was torn, and had to do her job — when suddenly the alarm stopped.

TJ had arrived at the store and typed in the security code to disarm it. But the moment underscored the importance of the protests, Hadley says. And it helped inspire [the message that she posted to social media that morning](#). "[W]indows are not lives. Dreams deferred cause rage. Our window is broken but the roots of this are in 400 years of knees on necks."

The message resounded with Urban Grape's customers, who responded on Tuesday with the store's single highest day of sales in its 10-year history. It was one of several area

businesses which, despite experiencing theft and damage during the protest's aftermath, chose to use the moment to help amplify the message of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The Concepts store on Newbury Street was among those hit hardest, with vandals breaking through its windows and grabbing sneakers and winter coats brazenly on live television Sunday night. But the brand took to its [Instagram page the next day](#) to underscore its commitment to "Eracism."

The term, embraced by protesters in recent days, means to eliminate the belief that one race is superior to another, said the store's owner, Tarek Hassan.

"We are angry. We are upset. No one should ever live in fear," he wrote on the store's Instagram page. "We condemn bigotry, racism and violence. We respect each other, as human beings, period."

Further down the street, the clothing store Riccardi was also ransacked, but the store chose to speak out in support of protesters. "The store can be rebuilt and the merchandise replaced," [the company wrote](#) in a post on Wednesday. "Those who have lost their lives cannot be."

Joamil Rodriguez's South End streetwear shop, Laced, saw over \$75,000 worth of merchandise stolen in the 10 minutes between when the alarm went off and when he arrived at the store early Monday morning. As Rodriguez began picking up T-shirts strewn on the floor, a vandal reached in the window and asked him to pass him a backpack that had been left behind.

"Are you kidding me, man?" Rodriguez snapped at the would-be thief. But he says he couldn't get angry — or pin the damage and theft on the protesters. "There really is a bigger issue here right now, and I don't want to distract from that," he said.

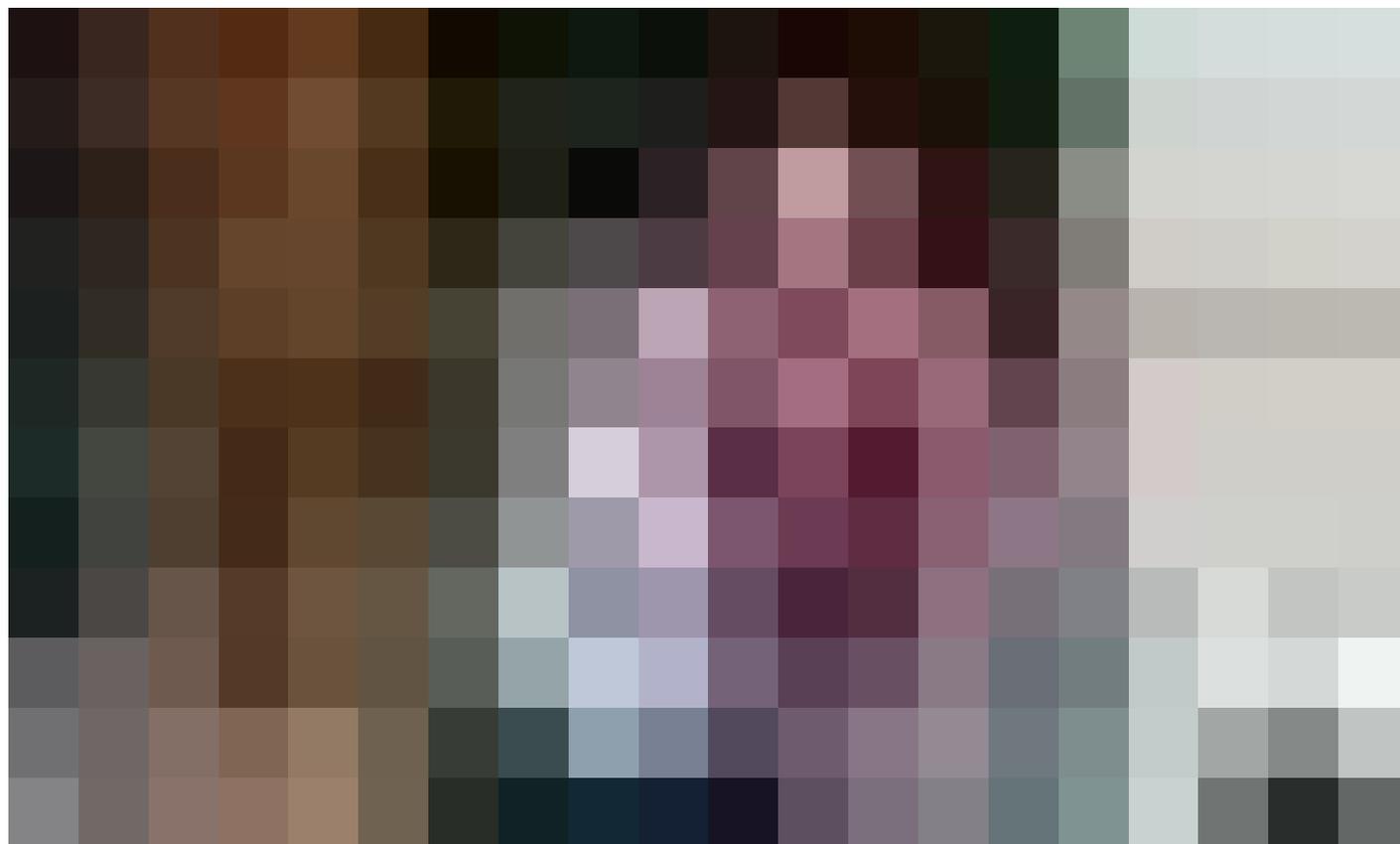
His store does a lot of work with area youth nonprofits, he continued. "I can relate and

understand to their feeling frustrated and not being heard, and not knowing how to channel it."

So on Monday, Rodriguez [used social media](#) to help demonstrate the leadership he hopes his store inspires. "While we don't condone the actions and are saddened by the vandalism that went down late last night at the end of what had been a beautiful and highly successful protest, we are more deeply saddened by the loss of life," he wrote.

On [Tuesday](#), he joined the protesters who gathered in Copley Square and marched with his girlfriend to the State House. He said he feels that business owners and brands have a unique platform at this moment to help amplify and educate their audience about the issues at hand.

"The tides are changing. I've seen a lot of big corporations take a stance — it really is a sign that amid all the damage and the chaos there's some traction and something moving forward," he said. "It is super important for companies to come out and accept that there is a bigger problem with police brutality."



Hadley (left) and TJ (right) Douglas, the owners of the Urban Grape wine store on Columbus Avenue in the South End are pictured in front of their business. JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF

TJ Douglas of the Urban Grape said the last several days for him have been profound. He said he's had an outpouring of support from friends and customers reaching out to acknowledge for the first time the unique challenges he faces as a Black business owner, one who often gets ignored by people who don't realize he owns the store.

"We didn't become a Black-owned business on Monday," he said. "We've always been trying to amplify the voices of Black winemakers and have a store where everyone felt welcome."

But at the urging of the couple's 13-year-old son, he and Hadley spray-painted "Black-owned business" on the plywood now hanging in the store's windows. TJ says he did so with mixed emotions: He doesn't want anyone to assume it's being done so that Black people won't loot the store, as he believes that's a false narrative. He hopes it will instead be received as a message that "I'm proud to be known as a Black-owned business," he said.

"The fact is," he continued, "it's a broken window, it's not a life. ... The looting and breaking windows in my store have nothing to do, in my eyes, with the protest and having equal rights."

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