BLACK IN SILICON VALLEY

A Theme Proposal on the Underrepresentation of Black Professionals in Silicon Valley

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Background

Since its inception, Silicon Valley has been revered by the entire world as the technological sector that fosters the most innovation and the greatest number of groundbreaking contributions to the world since the Digital Revolution. Yet Black techmakers and entrepreneurs are largely underrepresented in the Valley. Statistics show that Blacks make up shockingly low percentage of employees and leaders at each major tech company. The data I present during the theme program will emphasize the dire demographic state of the region that is so vital to global innovation. I will show quotes from articles and short video clips of how Silicon Valley has largely developed into an elitist, exclusive monoculture that is not very welcoming to people who don’t fit the stereotype (as shown in an ad for the new TV sitcom, Silicon Valley, on page 2). I will then go on to argue that the Valley’s increasing monoculture will unfortunately inhibit Silicon Valley companies from creating innovative products that enrich the lives of the Black community. In reality, our needs aren’t being ideated and our ideas aren’t being developed. My theme program will work to understand the problems at play in the Silicon Valley region that have contributed to its complete lack of diversity. Yet I will then go on to highlight and celebrate the Black techmakers and entrepreneurs that have made an impact in Silicon Valley and the tech industry. I’d like to end in a discussion on how we can build and support next generation of Black techmakers to increase Black representation. This will allow the Valley to improve and cultivate diversity rather than destroying it, and once again become the Valley of innovation, and the Valley that enriches all of our lives.

Data & Research

DIVERSITY: TECH

Google

60% Caucasian
34% Asian
1% Native Hawaiian
7% Other
3% Multiracial
2% Hispanic

Twitter

58% Caucasian
34% Asian
7% Native Hawaiian
2% Other
3% Multiracial

Apple

54% Caucasian
23% Asian
7% Native Hawaiian
7% Other
2% Multiracial
2% Hispanic

Facebook

53% Caucasian
41% Asian
1% Native Hawaiian
1% Other

eBay

40% Caucasian
56% Asian
2% Native Hawaiian
2% Other

Yahoo

85% Caucasian
15% Asian
1% Native Hawaiian

LinkedIn

94% Caucasian
6% Asian

Gigaom graphic by Biz Carson. Source: Company diversity reports released as of August 19, 2014. Cisco, Pinterest, Microsoft, HP and Intel did not release tech breakdowns.

Organizations for Silicon Valley Diversity & Inclusion

“"We found that when you leave out people of color you leave out a market that leads to growth.”

- Jesse Jackson
The infographics I’ve shown above are the best visual representations I’ve found so far that fully highlight the demographic breakdown of Silicon Valley. The numbers are extremely low, and in practice, they share the harsh truth of what it means to work in Silicon Valley for many Black professionals. To give a qualitative perspective, I’ll also highlight the experiences of Justin Edmund, a designer at Pinterest who was the only black employee at the company for a long time.

**Why?**

At this point in my research, I’ll try to hone in on exactly why so few Black professionals have found a place in Silicon Valley. This part of my research presentation will focus a little more on the social psychology and educational aspect of the situation. In reality, aspiring Black Silicon Valley professionals face stereotype threat while going through higher education and even into their careers. Stereotype threat has a negative effect on their self-efficacy and academic and professional performance, leading to higher dropout rates from STEM programs and company attrition rates. In the end, these conditions perpetuate the underrepresentation of Black professionals in STEM fields. Furthermore, blacks in Silicon Valley are not always comfortable engaging socially in the homogenous environments of university engineering departments and tech companies. And according to the social cognitive career theory, higher support and lower social barriers are important parts of building self-efficacy in one’s career. So groups that “fit in” will feel supported and have higher self-efficacy they’ll continue through their degree programs and tech career trajectories. And unfortunately, aspiring Black professionals are being left behind and may change their careers instead of entering into the tech world. As I continue doing research for my presentation, I’ll look for interviews with black Silicon Valley professionals to learn more about the challenges that they’ve faced as they moved through their careers.

Additionally, Silicon Valley puts an emphasis on developing a company culture from the beginning that is strong and prevalent throughout the organization. Unfortunately, if companies don’t start off with diversity in mind, these cultures can be exclusive. Silicon Valley doesn’t just need a demographic change; a cultural one may be necessary as well.
Notable Blacks in Silicon Valley & Entrepreneurship

Since I didn’t want to focus just on the negative side of this topic, I decided to also share information about some notable black people who have impacted Silicon Valley.

- **Tristan Walker**: founder of Walker & Company (creates consumer products for people of color). First Black entrepreneur-in-residence at the venture capital Andreessen Horowitz.
- **Jay Z**: founder of Tidal, the new online music streaming service, with premium sound quality.
- **Kimberly Bryant**: founder of Black Girls Code, Sr. Project Manager at Genentech.
- **David Drummond**: Google Sr. Vice President – Corporate Development & Chief Legal Officer.
- **Ime Archibong**: Facebook Manager of Strategic Partnerships.
- **Angela Benton**: Founder and CEO of NewMe Accelerator.

### Five-O

These teenagers developer the mobile app called **Five-O** that allows people to document good and bad interactions with police.

**Black Impact on Silicon Valley**

Finally, I’d like to end my presentation sharing research about how important Blacks are to Silicon Valley and the entire consumer tech economy. After all, African Americans’ buying power is now over $1 trillion, according to a recent Nielsen report. Furthermore, more black adults use smartphones than whites and 26% of Black Internet users are on Twitter. It is clear that we’ve become a significant part of the tech market, and more Silicon Valley companies truly need to prioritize our needs and develop our products. To do so, more Blacks must be represented.

**Discussion: Bringing more Color to the Valley**

1. How can students at Stanford University engage the Silicon Valley community in a way that promotes diversity in the region?
2. Do you agree with my causes for the level of Black underrepresentation in Silicon Valley companies? If not, please identify other potential causes.


Publicity Plan
I’d publicize my event through emails to different mailing lists that would consider my topic interesting and relevant. Some of these lists include: The Diaspora, CS Majors List, BASES, SBSE as well as communities I’m a part of including my Freshman & Sophomore Dorm Lists. The event emails would include digital fliers that displayed my Theme Program topic in an interesting way. I’d also send personal invites to my friends to publicize to their friends and bring more people out to my theme program by word of mouth.

Necessary Materials
I would hopefully use a projector so that I could display a Powerpoint and show video clips and infographics during my presentation.

We are the 1%...
Black in Silicon Valley!
UJAMAA THEME PROGRAM

Come learn about the underrepresentation of Black professionals in Silicon Valley!
Tonight @ 6 PM in Ujamaa Drake Lounge