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Almost 40% Of Minority Teens Want Tech Careers, Research Finds

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The lack of diversity in tech, both gender-based and racial, is a hot button issue. So, it should come as welcome news that a recent research survey (<http://www.creatingitfutures.org/download-teen-whitepaper>) found that three of the top ten desired careers among Black and Hispanic students from low to middle-income families were in the tech field and that, upon learning what types of work are associated with IT, 70% of teens surveyed expressed at least some enthusiasm for these jobs. The survey, conducted by the Creating IT Futures Foundation, found a strong appetite for tech pursuits among minority students, but confidence in the skills required for these careers and access to the opportunities that would make them attainable is still lacking. For example, only a quarter of teens surveyed considered themselves to be skilled in computer science, while a third reported they're proficient at working with technology. Half of teens reported being told by a parent and/or a teacher that they are not good at STEM subjects.

Almost 47% of teen respondents said their attraction to tech was based on the fact that these jobs pay well. Today's high schoolers are far from naïve. The realities of a sluggish economy and high

unemployment are the backdrop against which they've grown up. They've been bombarded with images of technological innovators as movie hero (Zuckerberg) and secular god (Jobs). If they haven't read a slew of those "Top College Majors To Make You Rich, Rich, Rich" lists (<http://www.vox.com/2015/1/28/7929137/college-majors-salary-richest>), it's guaranteed that their parents (the most influential figures in their lives) and their teachers have. It makes perfect sense then that students would gravitate toward careers that sound tech-related (read: secure and lucrative), even if they're still fuzzy on the details about what the career involves or even what IT stands for (only 21% of surveyed teens and 30% of parents felt they knew definitively what the abbreviation meant).

But how is this appetite for tech jobs translating to educational choices?

Among Black and Hispanic students who pursue and complete Bachelor's degrees, we're not seeing a carryover of the enthusiasm for tech work identified in the survey. In a 2011 Georgetown University study (<https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/whatsitworth-complete.pdf>) on the economic value of college majors, researchers found that School Student Counseling, Human Services and Community Organization accounted for fully 79% of the majors for degrees obtained by Black graduates. For Hispanic graduates, Biological Engineering, International Business and Social Psychology represented almost two-thirds of majors for the degrees awarded. As well, while college enrollment among Blacks and Hispanics has surged (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/24/more-hispanics-blacks-enrolling-in-college-but-lag-in-bachelors-degrees/>) in recent years, completion rates for both groups lags behind that of White and Asian students.

While a college degree is not necessarily a strict requirement (<http://motherboard.vice.com/read/you-dont-need-a-degree-to-work-in-tech-and-thats-good-news>) to work in tech, those without formal credentials will be competing for entry-level roles with those who do have degrees. In the absence of post-secondary education, the need for on-the-job training becomes even more critical. (<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fonforb.es%2F1M1zs6M&text=In%20the%20absence%20of%20post-secondary%20education%2C%20the%20need%20for%20on-the-job%20training%20becomes%20even%20more%20critical.>) And, unfortunately, employers are offering less and less of that (<http://conversableeconomist.blogspot.ca/2015/02/a-decline-in-on-job-training.html?spref=tw>). Between the period of 1996 to 2008, the percentage of workers receiving employer-sponsored training declined from 19.4% to 11.2% for employer-paid training and from 13.1% to 8.4% for on-the-job training.

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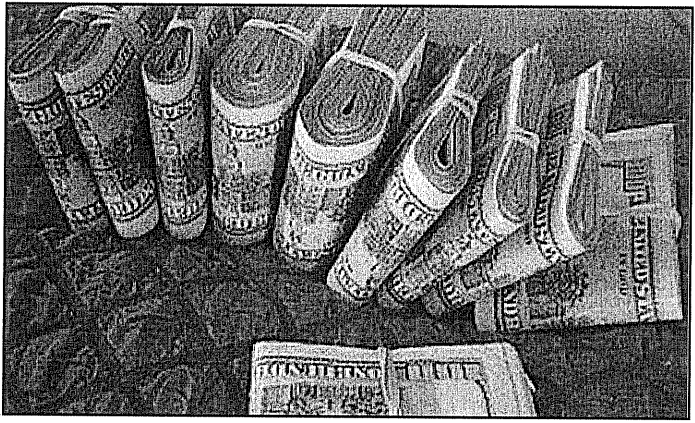
The US is trailing other countries in STEM education and the relative diversity among leading tech companies (for example, 94% of tech roles at Google are filled by White or Asian employees and 83% are filled by men (<https://gigaom.com/2014/08/21/eight-charts-that-put-tech-companies-diversity-stats-into-perspective/>)) is shameful. Here we have data showing young minority students expressing great interest in the type of knowledge work jobs we badly need to fill (http://www.jec.senate.gov/public//index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=6aaa7e1f-9586-47be-82e7-326f47658320). Now, the question becomes how do we help them to move from youthful enthusiasm to gainful employment?

Learn more about my work (<http://www.secretagentresearch.com/>) and connect with me on [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com/GenerationMeh) (<http://www.twitter.com/GenerationMeh>).

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