

Apple expands coding partnership with Black schools as tech firms grapple with lack of diversity

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Apple is expanding its coding partnership with historically black colleges and universities as big tech firms face increased scrutiny surrounding diversity and inclusion.

The iPhone giant said Thursday that it's adding 10 more HBCUs to its year-old community education program meant to create opportunities for people seeking to learn coding skills. The announcement comes a month after the company launched a racial equality initiative aimed at communities of color.

Under the expansion into more HBCUs, Apple will give an increasing number of people of color "the building blocks of coding," the company said in a press release. Coding is the infrastructure that makes digital technologies operate, and more Black programmers put more Black people in the running for in-demand, high-paying jobs tech jobs.

Morehouse College in Georgia, Tougaloo College in Mississippi, Dillard University in Louisiana and Prairie View A&M University in Texas are among Apple's roster of partnership schools.

Of the 24 locations listed in Apple's Community Education initiative, 12 are HBCUs, which were generally established in the 1800s to serve the needs of the Black community toward the end of slavery for the decades that followed.

It's clear that tech giants, including Apple, have a diversity problem.

Many companies including Facebook and Google have faced increasing backlash over lackluster minority representation, especially at a time when many firms are declaring to be allies in the Black Lives Matter movement.

While Black people make up roughly 13% of the population, representation at tech firms is minuscule.

From 2013 to 2018, Facebook failed to meaningfully increase the number of employees from underrepresented groups in its U.S.

workforce, a U.S. TODAY analysis shows. The number of Black employees rose from 1% to roughly 3.7%.

In 2012 at Google, African Americans made up roughly 1.5% of U.S. employees. In 2018, the most recent figures available for Google parent company Alphabet, its workforce was 2.6% Black.

Last month, Apple CEO Tim Cook acknowledged that said his company "must do more" to fight racism and promote diversity.

In a letter on Apple's website, Cook vowed to bring more technology to underserved school systems and address inclusion and diversity within its ranks.

"To create change, we have to reexamine our own views and actions in light of a pain that is deeply felt but too often ignored," Cook wrote. "Issues of human dignity will not abide standing on the sidelines. To the Black community—we see you. You matter and your lives matter."

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