



The New Fight in Civil Rights



→ *The Rev. Jesse Jackson* puts tech companies on notice to diversify their workforces

BY NATALIE Y. MOORE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEOFFREY BLACK

I**N 1967, A TALL COUNTRY BOY FROM GREENVILLE, S.C.,** spread the gospel of Black economic justice in Chicago. Future minister Jesse L. Jackson, as director of Operation Breadbasket, negotiated agreements with the local food and beverage industry. The 26-year-old's persistence resulted in 2,000 jobs for African-Americans.

Jackson was christened the “apostle of economics” in the August issue of *EBONY* that year. Decades later, he has taken on corporate America, including the U.S. automotive industry, for its lack of minority inclusion. Since the late 1990s, Jackson has successfully guaranteed billions in minority auto industry subcontracting. Now he sets his eyes on the next frontier of American ingenuity: Silicon Valley.

The iconic civil rights leader has pressured tech companies such as Google and Twitter to publicly reveal their gender and ethnic employee data. In fact, Jackson paired up with ColorOfChange.org to force Twitter to publicize its diversity employee figures. If it did not, Jackson and the ColorOfChange.org team promised to launch a campaign using the social media giant's platform to call out the corporation. Without Jackson's prodding, it's unlikely these firms would have had any incentive to fess up.»

Jackson stands in the
main auditorium at
Rainbow PUSH's
Chicago headquarters.



As these businesses gradually released their workplace diversity statistics last summer, the results weren't all that surprising—Silicon Valley employment is overwhelmingly White and male.

HERE'S THE BREAKDOWN:

Google: 2 percent Black, 30 percent women
Twitter: 2 percent Black, 30 percent women
Apple: 7 percent Black, 30 percent women
Facebook: 2 percent Black, 31 percent women
EBay: 7 percent Black, 42 percent women
Yahoo: 2 percent Black, 37 percent women
LinkedIn: 2 percent Black, 39 percent women

The numbers hardly reflect the high Black consumer rate. According to the Pew Research Center, 76 percent of Black adults use Facebook and 30 percent log on to LinkedIn.

Jackson sat down with EBONY at the Rainbow PUSH Coalition headquarters in Chicago to discuss why he believes taking on Silicon Valley is the latest incarnation of the Civil Rights Movement. While the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reviews his inquiry on tech hiring, he feels Blacks need to create an equally advantageous relationship with the tech world. "We must demand two-way trade; reciprocal, mutual beneficial, two-way trade," he asserts. "Just as our vote is a big factor, so are our dollars." Never one to back down from a battle, Jackson further explains his latest cause.

EBONY: Out of all the industries to confront about diversity, why Silicon Valley?

JACKSON: We're focusing on Silicon Valley because it's the fastest-growing and most robust industry in the world, and we over-index on buying and engaging in the products it delivers. Some of these companies have the notion that the skill level required to do the work is too technical for African-Americans. The fact is, the majority of the jobs are in nontech areas such as law, marketing, advertising and construction. John Thompson is the chairman of Microsoft and African-American. David Drummond, an African-American attorney, is the person who incorporated Google. There's nothing in Silicon Valley we cannot do.

EBONY: What has been the response to your claims?

JACKSON: At first, there was great resistance. Google announced its numbers, which were bad, but the breakthrough was that it announced them. We went to Twitter, and the company said it wasn't going to cooperate. We aligned with

ColorofChange.org and said we're going to take 50,000 signatures on petitions to them and after four days, they gave in.

EBONY: Why don't these firms want to be transparent?

JACKSON: Several companies won a lawsuit for the right to not make EEOC reports public, the argument being they'd lose their competitive edge. They had the law on their side. So the Rainbow PUSH Coalition bought shares of stocks in those corporations and attended shareholder meetings. We said, "Mr. Chairman, what percentage of our company is Black, brown and Asian-American?" It's embarrassing because so many of the firms have such liberal images, but when it comes to these companies advertising in Black media, using Black-owned advertising or legal firms, we virtually don't exist. The truth is, many of our freedom allies may not always be our equality allies. They may react to us being shot in the street, but they're not necessarily for economic equality and parity.

EBONY: Have the firms done anything right since this campaign started?

JACKSON: They've begun to recruit. We're going to make sure they also seek out advertising opportunities with Black media. We see this as a direct pipeline between Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Silicon Valley by identifying certain students and connecting them to internships, which can help them get hired. That's why we had HBCUs at the annual Rainbow PUSH convention meeting with Hewlett-Packard and Google. Just look at how many HBCUs have STEM programs: Jackson State, Southern University, Texas Southern, Morehouse, Spelman and Morgan State.

EBONY: Now that you've exposed the numbers, what's next?

JACKSON: We demand that the EEOC hold hearings. Silicon companies are moving east to cities such as Dallas, Chicago



Jackson chats with Northeastern Illinois University Prof. Emeritus Robert Starks (right) as Rainbow PUSH's international affairs director James Gomez looks on.

and D.C. They're bringing patterns of substantial racial segregation and exclusion, which must be challenged. The next point is for them to set goals, targets and time-tables based upon our investments.

EBONY: How can the EEOC add pressure?

JACKSON: The EEOC hearings and contract compliance set the standards, which are just reasonably representative of the population, but they're still far off the mark. One thing that needs to be done is to stop importing average-wage computer analysts. But Silicon Valley has actively sought H-1B visa workers from Asia. Not because they're better, but because they're often more affordable. They're brain-draining those countries and not training American workers. And being in the States on green cards, these workers can never protest because they're stuck in a tense situation. The most despicable thing is that these companies collaborated to get huge offshore and domestic tax

Jackson's Rainbow PUSH office hosts mementos from his decades of activism.



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breaks and lobbied to bring in these workers from Asia. The Black and Latino caucuses in Congress must stop that from happening and demand that our workers get trained. These jobs are not beyond our capacity.

EBONY: Is there a hiring number or benchmark that you want to achieve?

JACKSON: It should be 15 percent, just because of our percentage of the population. This is not just a Black thing—it's relevant to Latinos and Asian-Americans. We're facing the same obstacles. What we have to do now is better prepare for the future by learning the science of economic trade and reciprocal trade. That means getting our kids early on in the stock market game. We must have a culture of economic development, not just fighting for opportunity.

EBONY: Why is this the new push in the Civil Rights Movement?

JACKSON: The most fundamental shift in our struggle over the last 50 years was moving from the struggle of freedom to one of equality and parity. I envision four stages in our struggle. The first was to end slavery. The second came after

the Reconstruction collapse after which we were immersed in almost 100 years of Jim Crow. The third stage was fighting for the right to vote. The fourth stage is access to capital. Although we're free from slavery and Jim Crow, and have the right to vote, we hardly own a building in downtown America because that's access to capital, credit and trust.

EBONY: You've been fighting the good fight for economic justice for Blacks for five decades. In a capitalistic society, is this really where we should be looking for jobs?

JACKSON: You look for jobs where you have the skill capacity to be creative and to gain leverage. Why are we so good at football, basketball and baseball? It's because whenever the playing field is even, the rules are public, the goals are clear, referees are fair and the score transparent, we can make it. When you think about the things that we use and consume every day, we have no leverage. When you vote less but spend more than your power, it's a bad formula. **E**

Natalie Y. Moore is an award-winning Chicago-based journalist and co-author of The Almighty Black P Stone Nation: The Rise, Fall, and Resurgence of an American Gang.

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