What It's Like to Be a Black Woman in Tech: A Q&A with Kaya Thomas

By Kasee Bailey

7–9 minutes

In July 2016, Kaya Thomas, a rising senior at Dartmouth, took on one of Silicon Valley's largest and most influential tech companies: Facebook. Thomas wrote a response to a *Wall Street Journal* [article that shed light on the company's diversity problem](#) (only 2% of Facebook's workforce is Black and just 2% is Latino, but Facebook blamed those stats on the public education system and a supposed lack of talent).

Thomas took issue with that assessment. In her [response to Facebook's excuses](#), she wrote, "There are thousands of other Black and Latinx who graduate every year with computer science Bachelor degrees. Most of us don't get hired into [the tech industry](#). So instead of putting in the effort to look for us, Facebook is ignoring the fact that we even exist."

This summer Thomas is working in Silicon Valley as an intern, and [doing a fellowship with Code2040](#), a group that helps build up Black and Latino talent in the industry. We asked her what it's been like to work as a Black [woman in tech](#) in her internships and what top companies should be doing to attract minority candidates like her.

First off, what led you to pen your "Invisible Talent" piece as a response to the WSJ article?

I was really hurt by reading the piece. I actually felt personally hurt. I knew that I wouldn't be the only one who felt that way, so I wrote the piece really for the other people who I know who would feel that way, other people of color who are trying to break into the industry and trying to prove their worth. I didn't get a response from Facebook, but I did get a response from other tech companies that reached out and said, "Great piece, thanks for your bravery, we're trying to do better. If you're interested in a position …" Haha.

How can tech companies do better in the talent search?

There are a lot of different ways to approach it. Are you grabbing students from the same top, elite schools? Just because a student went to a top, elite school doesn't necessarily mean they're going to be a top engineer. Academics is so, so different from the work you do in industry, so it's important to branch out. Look to more schools, state schools. Look to more local schools, look to more historically Black colleges and universities. Look to more historically Hispanic institutes. There are a lot of schools that are not being included in their recruiting pipeline.

Then if you're looking for more senior people, not necessarily looking for recent grads, you just have to expand your network, right? Do a better job. If you're a company, sponsor a women-who-code meetup or sponsor [a Black techie meetup](). I'm not saying it's easy but if it's a priority of your company and you put in the time and effort, it's definitely doable.