Essay A

I grew up observing my parents’ cautious, Chinese-immigrant approach to weaving themselves into the fabric of American life. This translated to my own talent for noticing patterns of behavior that most of my classmates overlooked – from the phenomenon of diagonally-sliced Wonder Bread to the relative status of Capri-Sun packs versus Minute Maid cartons. Looking back, it’s fair to say that we fundamentally operated with a deference to the status quo. As a result, I viewed issues in the social realm – particularly the reasons we had to mimic our white peers and position ourselves above other minorities – as simply the way things were, an unfortunate symptom of an unchangeable society.

I realize now that my parents’ diligence playing by the rules helped them acquire the privilege that allowed me to grow up agnostic to politics and seemingly distanced from injustice. I am grateful for my relatively easy childhood and the opportunities I had access to, but also embarrassed that my reckoning with socioeconomic inequity happened only after I left home and began to contemplate the circumstances of my new environments.

Working two summers in California’s quintessential technology hubs meant I enjoyed a seemingly endless amount of resources, while each day walking by homeless encampments and discarded needles in the street. I remember registering the dissonance of being greeted from those walks with “Build products for everyone” proudly adorning the office walls, knowing “everyone” was selective, that “everyone” left out those who often stood to benefit the most.

In hindsight, the most important result of my first experiences working in technology epicenters was not necessarily learning C++ or software architecture design, but the bursting of the bubble that enabled my indifference to inequity. This unleashed a wave of questioning not only of my own work, but of my team’s, my company’s, and the technology sector’s more broadly. Fundamentally, what was I producing and who would it benefit?

In the past few years, this internal questioning has inspired me to recognize the important role I have as an Asian American woman engineer with a broad network across the AAPI community and technology industry. These networks provide an opportunity to build the diverse, strong coalitions that history shows have the power to create real social change. This responsibility dawned on me this past summer, when I joined a group of activists in Washington, DC to protest George Floyd’s murder. When I returned to work the following Monday, I was met with radio silence – our company did not even acknowledge how we, as an influential company with roots throughout New York and the broader financial technology industry, could leverage our resources to contribute to the broadening fight for racial justice.

Most of the engineers I work with are AAPI – many first generation – and I figured the complacency that shaped my own experience growing up was fueling their silence. However, as I engaged with more colleagues to test my hypothesis, I realized there was a strong sentiment that the company should more actively enable social change. All people needed was a catalyst – someone to step in as a leader, bridge diverse perspectives, and engage groups of individuals in discussion together. After consulting with a network of new joiners, mentors, and employee resource groups, a close friend and I penned a letter to our CTO, listing specific ways in which the company should take action. Within just a few weeks, the company announced their commitment to all of our proposed initiatives, both immediate and long term.

What matters most to me is leveraging technology and the technology industry to ignite social change. My contributions in the workplace are only the start of a career that I plan to center on my visions of increased socioeconomic and racial equity. And while technology has, in many ways, contributed to rising inequity, I fundamentally believe it has the power to change the status quo for the better.

Essay B

The most memorable project I worked on as an undergraduate was constructing a predictive and fair hiring algorithm. The prompt seemed straightforward – but I quickly realized the catch. The training data itself was biased, stemming from historically unfair hiring practices. This project sparked a curiosity about machine learning’s social impact, revealing the critical need to correct algorithmic bias, especially in domains like criminal justice where historical bias is particularly pronounced. My aspiration ever since has been to become an entrepreneur that creates fair ML solutions to social problems most aggravated by engrained bias and thus with the most impactful solution space. GSB – home to leading AI research and nestled in Silicon Valley – is the ideal setting to push my ideas and development as a business leader. Attending GSB would provide me the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of business’ role in social innovation, as well as the leadership skills that have allowed many women alumni to trailblaze at the intersection of business and tech.

GSB’s broad, but business-centered, education will help me develop the well-rounded perspectives critical to solving society’s toughest problems. Specifically, courses such as Strategy Beyond Markets, as well as the opportunity to explore interdisciplinary studies in the sociology or economics department, will help me deeply understand business’ far-reaching impacts. Further, GSB’s social innovation curriculum offers the targeted support that will enhance my business acumen to include important considerations for successful social entrepreneurship, which will be critical to tackling the most pressing problems in ethical AI.

To support my academic and entrepreneurial pursuits, I want to experiment with different leadership styles. I anticipate taking full advantage of GSB’s uniquely tight-knit, multidisciplinary, and multicultural student body and cross-cultural collaboration programs like Stanford-Tsinghua to do so. Moreover, feedback-driven courses like Leadership Labs will help me critically analyze how I lead, and how I can continuously work towards a more equitable and inclusive leadership style.

I am confident that GSB’s curriculum and experiences will best prepare me to realize my entrepreneurial passion. Most importantly, I know that they will push me to follow the footsteps of women leaders like Theresia Gouw, founder of a female-led venture firm, ultimately introducing more diversity and equity to the intersection of business and tech. GSB has a proven history of developing women leaders who share my vision of tech’s future, and I hope to use the GSB experience to advance this agenda forward in my own way.