Session 3: Black Inventors and Innovators at Work

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My Roles

- IBM Master Inventor
- Software Engineer
- R&D scientist
- Data scientist
- Government Researcher
- Academic
- Executive
- Coach
- Serial Entrepreneur
- Human Rights Commissioner
- AAAS-Lemelson Invention Ambassador
In a 2010 study of about 300,000 creativity tests going back to the 1970s found creativity has decreased among American children in recent years.

“Since 1990, children have become less able to produce unique and unusual ideas. They are also less humorous, less imaginative and less able to elaborate on ideas”.

Kyung Hee Kim,
Creativity Researcher
The College of William and Mary
Environment

- **People** - their biases, upbringing, and lived experiences.
- **Policies** - that lay out how they can lawfully operate.
- **Processes** - that dictate how things get done.
- **Institutions** - that re-enforce policies and people’s perceptions.
- **Practices** - within those institutions that cement it all together.
Foundations of the American Invention Environment

**Institutional Racism**

the systematic distribution of resources, power and opportunity in our society to the benefit of people who are white and the exclusion of people of color

**Institutional Sexism**

the systematic distribution of resources, power and opportunity in our society to the benefit of people who are white and male and the exclusion of women
Hard Truths

Your Innate Benefits = \( f(\text{Your proximity to whiteness}) \)

Your Visibility of System Inequities = \( f(\text{Your proximity to whiteness}) \)
US Census

The three-fifths compromise in practice through 1868, established that an enslaved person would be counted as three-fifths of a person.

“According to its constitutional mandate, the census does more than facilitate a body count; it also tells us whose body counts, and for how much.”

– Naomi Mezey 2003

(This instrument) Results in a “collective blindness [that] hinders the establishment of social facts, conceals inequality, and undermines the foundation of social science research, including that used in the design and evaluation of social policy.”

- Invisible Men, Becky Petitt, p3, 2012
The patent system simply was not available at that time to enslaved people — they were not considered American citizens, and the rights and provisions of the Constitution did not extend to them.

- Shontavia Johnson, America’s Always Had Black Inventors - Even When the Patent System Explicitly Excluded Them, 2017

There was and continues to be a consistently wide gap between the colorblind American patent system and certain groups of inventors, especially black inventors.

- Shontavia Johnson, The Colorblind Patent System and Black Inventors, 2019
History of Black Invention

• Many ideas stolen from Black:
  • cotton scraper, Boyd Bedstead, steamboat propeller, ...

• History Lost
  • [link](https://invention.si.edu/lost-histories-african-american-inventors)
At Work in America in the 2000s

• Mindset that:
  • Questions me because inventors should not look like me
  • Tries to re-appropriate and claim my work as someone else’s
  • Intentionally, and unintentionally, puts down
  • Has very little support for my efforts
  • Has very little understanding or empathy of my cultural context
  • That views me as an inferior “other”

• Practices that:
  • Consistently rates my work and performance as sub-standard; even while out-producing peers
  • Support marginalization and company exit
MY WHY -
THE DRIVE BEHIND
MY PASSION

Problem
Constraints / Necessity
Lived Experience
Invention:
The act of bringing things together in a novel way to create something that did not exist before.

Innovation:
The process of creating value by applying novel solutions to meaningful problems.

Technology:
The application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes.
Patents

• Twenty-seven (27) patent filed

• Twenty patents (20) published

• One (1) in progress
  • Long Term Care Discovery

Source: https://www.tyronegrandison.org/patents.html
Traditional View of Invention Process

1. Observe
2. Brainstorm
3. Prototype
4. Experiment
5. Iterate
6. Launch
Problem

Finding a long-term care facility for a senior relative is time-consuming, laborious, manual, and frustrating.
Constraints

- There is an existing referral model
- The long-term care provider space is not standardized
- Consumers do not initially understand the language and concepts
- Navigating processes involved in the application procedure is difficult or the consumer
- Industry is heavily regulated
- Payment management is thorny
Lived Experience
Steps

1. Get Clear On The Problem
2. Get Clear On Solution Attributes
3. Craft an Initial Solution
4. Get Feedback from Users
5. Iterate and Improve
6. Release Solution
7. Repeat Step 4 onwards
Final Product

Save more on long term care with thousands of deals made every day

Save more on long term care with thousands of deals made every day

FEATURE

WHERE

GET ANYWHERE

WHEN

LONG TERM

ANYTIME

HOW

RESIDENT

1

LEVEL OF CARE

INDEPENDENT LIVING

ASSISTED LIVING

SKILLED NURSING

MEMORY CARE

MONTHLY BUDGET

MINIMUM

$1,000

MAXIMUM

$20,000

$1,000

$20,000

Search

Featured Long Term Care Facilities

Palazzo Catholic

(0, 507)

Lakefront Manor Healthcare

(1, 507)

Carmel-by-the-Sea Manor House

(3, 507)

Pacific Heights Retirement Center

(6, 507)
Good News
I am the sum of the lessons of my prior experiences
Past Challenges

- People
- Organizational Practices
Thank You

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