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URBANIME MIXTAPE

BEELAW QUIRKCHAT FOUNDER

What does it look like to bet on yourself; to go down the less traveled route? Many of us turn to our favorite comic and manga heroes for inspiration, as they face their antagonists head on or travel to unfamiliar territory. Yet, we forget to see how applicable these stories are to our own lives.

Being Black in STEM can feel like you are a protagonist in your own comic, with the "villains" being passive aggressive coworkers. unsupportive policies, paralyzing self-doubt and anxiety. I started my STEM journey working in a cytogenetics lab and now work in tech as the CEO and Head of Product at QuirkChat, a venture-backed startup. From working hours in a lab to moving on to running a tech startup, I've had to bet on myself a million times over, with and without support of concerned loved ones.

While initially change is scary, pursuing my role in tech has been the most rewarding bet I've ever made. It's helped me learn how to stand up for what I believe in and made me realize that with knowledge, I can change the world. By nature, I am a problem solver and a Futurist. As a Black woman in tech, I can literally build and create the changes that I want to see in the world and alchemize my wildest dreams. I don't have to ask for permission, I can just build.

It is my dream that every Black person acknowledges their natural power within, and in turn uses that power to better the world. Whether you decide to start your own company, hone your UX design or engineering skills to improve

the accessibility and functionality of another company's product, improve a discriminatory algorithm in support of diverse creators or support an organization that aligns with your passions, the world will be much better off with you betting on yourself.

I am both thankful and excited that this issue is addressed to Black women and nonbinary in STEM. While we as a society are still leaps away from making STEM as inclusive and accepting as it needs to be, the Urbanime team is helping us build community, find support and stay inspired.

Cheers to betting on ourselves so that we can better the world.

- Bee Law

QUIRKCHAT FOUNDER I BEE LAW

MIXTAPE TRACK LIST

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- **04:** 5QA | NIA ASEMOTA
- **05:** COMIC STORY | ASHA CHRISTIAN
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- **O8:** FASHION EDITORIAL I YOUNG UPSTARTS **21:** CEO FEATURE I BWTT
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URBANIME MIXTAPE VOLUME 03.00 OPEN SPACES:

THERESA SLATE

HOW THE SIMS SPARKED A CAREER OF EMPATHY

UX Design, the art of making a product usable, enjoyable, and accessible to all users, requires MacBooks, Adobe Creative suite software, and a mentor in the field.

Ethically, UX Design is based upon not catering to only one type of user. That would leave a product like a mobile app accessible to some and not all. However, the career path to the field itself isn't always accessible to lower class or underprivileged communities.

For Black and Brown folx working in tech, UX Design is a field with high pay starting at the entry-level and doesn't require coding. To know more about UX Design and its challenges is to understand why Theresa Slate goes so hard in the paint to help Black and Brown people get into the industry. A Sims-obsessed teen, she turned her passion for powerful engagement and interactions into a successful career as a User Experience (UX) Designer.

Theresa's adventure began by applying to the University of Cincinnati for a graphic design major, but she didn't get admitted, ultimately being accepted to digital. As a Senior UX designer and working for a mobile company designing an app, she moved to Chicago to advance her career as a designer.

Even though she was performing at a Senior level, she still had to take a job as an associate. Theresa learned this because a company she worked for was billing clients at Senior UX prices, but not paying her at that level.

Moving on to an official role as senior designer in 2016 for Cards Against Humanity, Theresa was able to gain the role she deserved. However, Cards Against Humanity was rife with challenges as allegations of a toxic culture began to surface. This combined with coming out to family, which was not well-received meant she needed to make a move and create a better mental space for her future.



After a two month sabbatical in China, becoming engaged to the love of her life, and embracing freelancing, she stayed there for a few years before returning to Chicago, determined to be a bridge for Black and Brown people into UX design.

"A lot of it now is advocacy inside and out. I'm at Northern Trust in Design Operations Capacity. So I'm helping with recruiting and stuff like that. Trying to make sure when we hire we have Black and Brown candidates to pull from. Making sure we're in those spaces. And making sure to address our biases."



Combining her passion for advocacy and the profession of UX, Theresa does a ton of panels, talks, and meetup groups to share as much insight and information as possible. She continues to say she wishes someone told her when to stop fighting in situations she didn't need to fight.

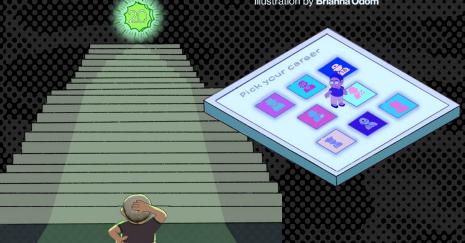
As an advocate in the UX space, she shared a particular story of a trans man who transitioned while he was on his job. He asked Theresa what he could do at a job that isn't respecting his pronouns, who he is, or his boundaries.

"I looked at him and I told him, 'You have to quit. You've done everything you can. And it's not your job to educate people on your marginalization. So if you work for a place that's not going to value you and respect who you are. there's nothing you can do."

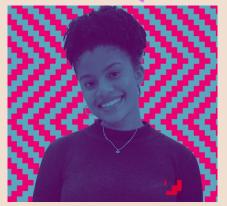
Full of great advice in a career sparked by her passion that started as a teenager, Theresa believes that while it is not her job to continuously take responsibility for the education of others, she will continue to advocate for diversity in a space defined by making products and services usable, enjoyable, and accessible to all.

"My skills have always outpaced the title and pay people are willing to give me," Theresa explains.

Article by **Junae Benne**Illustration by **Brianna Odom**



THE 50A NIA ASEMOTA



1. How long have you been in the tech space?

I always had a passion for tech and analyzing systems to see how they can be altered to better serve a given purpose. I disassembled controllers just to rebuild them. My early attempts at experimentation were priming me to become both scientist and engineer. Involvement in my high school's robotics team was my first exposure to the branches of engineering. I taught myself how to code, learning the fundamentals. Despite my limited prior experience, I became the only woman leading my team's programming and electrical departments.

2. When do you first remember wanting to create opportunities for other Black women in the tech space?

In high school, I developed a bridge program to introduce elementary and middle school students of color to the fundamentals of robotics and business. As a college freshman, I mentored students through the Engineering Tomorrow Inc. initiative. I traveled weekly to high schools in the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island, introducing students to the various engineering fields.

3. What has been your most memorable experience at NASA?

It was humbling interning this summer at NASA as a Software Engineer! Since changing my course of study, this was my first technical internship. It was incredible to have a Black Woman mentor! As part of the Commercial Smallsat Data Acquisition (CSDA) Program, we developed a project to lower the barrier of entry for current and prospective scientists to access and interpret NASA's Satellite Data. It's inspiring to know the CSDA data team is currently integrating our project into their user communication and outreach efforts.

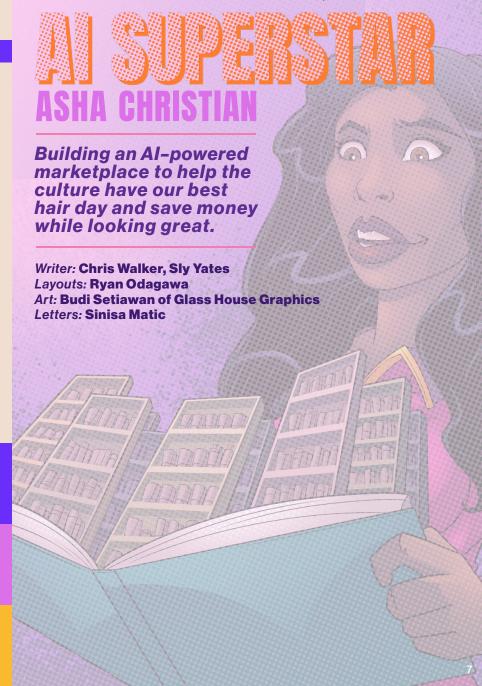
4. What's one surprising fact you've learned since working in this space?

Women in STEM make up 27% of the STEM workforce, while Black women account for 2.5% of science and engineering employees in the United States.

5. Why should we celebrate the work of Black women in the STEM field?

From Gladys Mae West's mathematical contributions to the GPS to Dr. Shirley Jackson's scientific breakthroughs that enabled others to invent the touch-tone phone, fiber optic cells, and caller ID and call waiting technology, Black women have made significant contributions to the field. Unfortunately, often written out of history books, many never get to see themselves as role models. It's crucial to recognize the instrumental contributions of these unsung Black heroes in order to inspire and empower future generations.



















ASHA CHRISTIAN, COILY APP FOUNDER, DEFINES OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A BLACK WOMAN IN TECH.



A rising star in the world of business and tech, be sure to follow her on social and download Coily to explore her inspired marketplace.

"I've been obsessed with hair since a young age! I bridged my background with tech and my love for hair and came up with Coily. I actually used to go onto YouTube to look up hair tutorials and even taught myself how to do box braids." "Coily's goal is to be a huge marketplace for a giant catalog of Black hair products, tools, wigs, weaves, extensions, and just about anything you can purchase, Coily serves as a giant catalog for that."

BOSS TALK

What does it mean to call the shots of million dollar funds and inspire the next generation of Black entrepreneurs?It means to do it with grace and style.

DAAZAYAH WALKER

Investment Portfolio Manager Quality Control Music

Managing the
Quality Control
investment
portfolio to bring
the interaction of
tech and music
to life

Black Pleated

Maxi Dress by Christopher

John Rogers

Ribbon Stripped

Slouchy Boots by Chelsea Paris

SARAH KNUST

Managing Director Cleo Capital

Empowering female founders to invest and streamline decentralization to spur innovation.

Giraffe Print Silk Blouse
Sergio Hudson
High Waist
Velvet Pants by
Sergio Hudson
Yellow Pumps by
Maison Christian
Louboutin

Illustration by Ryan Odagawa, Bruno Abdias, & JJ Kirby

MELISSA BRADLEY

Managing Partner 1863 Ventures

Bridging entrepreneurship and racial equity by helping entrepreneurs go from high potential to high growth

Glasses by
Coco and Breezy
T-Shirt by
Daily Paper
Kicks by
Brother Vellies

THEUPSTARTS

What happens when the status quo needs to be shaken up? Your passion transforms you into a founder with a vision for the future stepping forward with the confidence to make it happen.

E 3XL 20PHILLS

Google for Startups

COURTNEY
CALDWELL
CoFounder,
COO ShearShare

ShearShare Leading marketplace for on-demand space

at shops and salons

SALISA BERRIEN CEO – COI Energy Services, Inc.

Leveraging machine learning and AI to eliminate energy waste

ASHLEY EDWARDS
CEO - MindRight Health

Advancing health equity through radically accessible and inclusive mental health care

RIANA LYNN CEO – Journey Foods

Solving problems in food that affect our families, communities, and world.

Red Midi Dress by Sergio Hudson Hand Woven Bag by AAKS Leather Mules by Chelsea Paris

MID OW

Linen Midi Dress by
Fanm Mon
Pearl Drop Earrings & Necklace by
Mateo
Glazed Leather Mules by
Zou Xou

Geometric Print Midi Dress by Stella Jean Hoop Earrings by BYCHARI Boot Mules & Bucket Bag by Brother Vellies Velvet Tailored Blazer & Trousers by Lisou London T-Shirt by Telfar Heart Hoop Earrings by Yam Leather Loafers by Zou Xou

Illustration by Gabrielle Toussaint, Ryan Owagaga, & Bruno Abdias

A BLUE HAIRED UNICORN TO THE RESCUE

With a Lizzo, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion playlist fueling her, Madison Butler is ruthless in her mission to disrupt the way we think about work, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. She's best known on LinkedIn and Twitter - where she's racked up 96k and 7k followers, respectively – as the Blue Haired Unicorn. Her posts are always lively, spicy and she always has time to deliver a well-deserved clapback. With her infectious smile and sharp wit, she's completely overhauling the discussions we have about the way Black and Brown folx show up in the world. She does all this while serving as the Vice President of People and Impact at Grav, an Austin-based cannabistech company that designs "precision instruments for consuming cannabis."

"I went through a really traumatic experience in my early 20s that led me to realize that I needed to show up in the world as myself. And I started doing that, in my relationships, and with my family and with my friends, and really stopped watering myself down," she explained. "I started really thinking about what that meant at work. And I realized that I was one person from eight to five, but a very different person from five to ten. And why was that the case? Why did I have to be a different version of myself in order to be valuable in order to be worthy of respect? And so I started really examining the systems that exist within corporate America and realized that those systems aren't, in fact, broken. They work as they're intended for those who they're intended for. And so I started thinking about ways that I could show up to not only empower others [but show], that you can look like me and navigate like me and not be some watered-down version of yourself, and you can still be valuable, you are still valuable," she elaborates.

It was during this period of self-examination that Madison began writing content online.

"I originally started [writing] in the recruiting sector because that's the world that I knew the best. And then, when I started taking a really big zoom out, [I realized] recruiting isn't the problem, recruiting is actually the outcome of a much larger problem. And so I started thinking about the ways that you can dismantle those systems within corporate America. And now here we are today trying to, you know, essentially blow it up and build a system in a world that works for everyone," Madison explains.

The response Madison's work has drawn across various social media platforms has been pothing short of amazing.





"Honestly, all of that part is accidental. I guess I never started writing content to create a following. I wrote content because I wanted people to see the things that I wish I had read. When I was coming out of college, I think it would have saved me from experiencing a lot of workplace trauma had I known the red flags or had I known what it meant to be treated well at work," she explains.

Now, she's taking her mission a step further to help other Black and Brown professionals live and speak authentically at work, and not shy away from money conversations.

Madison explains, "In 2021, I kept seeing all of these panels that were full of all white men, or all white women. And when you ask the question 'Why did you not have a panel that was more representative of the world around us?', the thing that you always hear is, 'I can't find the Black speakers', or 'There just aren't enough Black speakers,' 'Black speakers only talk about anti-racism and DEI. And I said, well, that's absolutely not true."

So, she made a simple post on LinkedIn asking Black speakers of all industries to respond with their field of expertise and a contact email.

"At first, I had like 28 speakers, and I was like, damn, that's a lot of really good data. And it would be a shame if I just let this die in my comments section. And so I put it in a Google Excel spreadsheet, so I could keep track of it. And later, someone was like, 'Hey, let's turn this into, like, a database'. And so we moved it over to a different platform, creating an ability for people to sign up on their own. It's been eight weeks now. And we're at 2000 speakers," she explains.

For 2022, Madison's continued goal is to amplify Black speakers and executives.

Madison makes it clear, "We hear constantly, 'There's a pipeline problem, there are no Black executives," And I was like, I can absolutely solve that problem because that problem doesn't exist. And so I would like to grow this collection into different industries and different disciplines over the course of 2022 so, that way, anytime someone tells me they can't find a Black fill-in-the-blank, I have a solution for them, because in this day and age, there should be no excuse and I'm not willing to accept excuses any longer."

Article by **Colleen Buck**Illustrations by **Careful Ventures**

With a Lizzo, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion playlist fueling her, Madison Butler is ruthless in her mission to disrupt the way we think about work, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.





HTHOT HALKATHON

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This new Hackathon kicks off this February and will be going all summer long.

HipHopHackathon.com



ORDS OF WIZDOM

Wizdom Powell Interviewer: Colleen Buck



Community organizer, activist, and total badass Wizdom Powell is using her passions and talents to advance mental health and wellness. As the Creative Diversity Director at Headspace, she uses her expertise as a clinical psychologist and academic, combined with her deep interest in social justice, to bring nuance and accountability to the mental health conversation.

to environmental stress in real-time, how people situation to situation, and how we disrupt the Wizdom explains about her work.

happenstance. She was invited to give a talk at

conversation, [to] support the organization with some dialogues among employees and help them reimagine their strategy," Wizdom explained, "We

"The first thing that I did was to help the organization create principles for designing innovative content without bias or that mitigates bias," she elaborates.

and justice in their strategies regardless of their role in the organization. Wizdom helped organizations of different backgrounds and, in the

"We're an evolving demographic society," she adds, access to mental health tools and resources," she explains about her mission.

services specifically for Black men and boys.

"That requires, you know, sort of knowing what militates against them seeking help," she want them to. I hope I build this so they'll come, but Wizdom continues.

To that end. Wizdom has worked with numerous where they are, earn their trust through tailored health services delivery.

sensitive way, then we might be able to bridge some she concludes.

URBANIME

Interviewer: Colleen Buck Art: Angi

MEGAN GRAY AI | SUPER FOUNDER

Megan Gray is a force to reckon with. When faced with a life-altering condition, she put her technical skills to work in solving the problem and making the solution accessible to anyone who needs it. Her company, Moment Al, focuses on building autonomous systems and Al technology for vehicles for anyone falling under the protection of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

Megan begins, "My story is personal. I was

returning from a business trip, when suddenly it felt like something was kicking me in my head. It's still hard to explain the feeling. It was worse than any headache. I asked a flight attendant to move me to the back of the plane. That was the last thing I remember before waking up in the hospital."

The doctors estimated that Megan had suffered ten seizures that day - fortunately there was no brain bleed like originally thought - and probably would have died had there not been a nurse on her flight to attend to her. They said she'd never drive again. Megan refused that outcome and began building technology to help regain her independence.

"I moved to Memphis, Tennessee since I could no longer work, Being an epileptic not only limited my driving, it also limited my accessibility for simple tasks. I had to choose someplace I could afford

rideshare

[services] or walk," she explained.

Building this technology wasn't cheap. Megan didn't have much money, so she found a creative way of funding the project by playing professional poker.

"I'd grind a poker table four days a week, then look on Amazon to see which parts we needed to build [the technology], including business cards, t-shirts, the incorporation papers to actually start the company, etc. I'd work a poker table for hours and then go home to order parts," she muses. "I started with \$300 in my pocket and now I have a company worth millions. It's worked out great."

Megan has expanded the company from her 500 square-foot apartment in Memphis to a 5000 square-foot lab at George Washington University in D.C.. Megan credits her success

> other founders: "The best thing is to dismiss negative thoughts. Always know your subject better than anyone else. You can't change the way people think, but I know I present my company as best I can. Just focus on the things you can control."

with refusing to accept the

options offered and with

a decision to create her

own future. Her advice to

TECH ADJACENT EXPERTS IN THE FIELD

The property of the second of

Tess Bradford & Taylor Shine

Tess Nance Bradford, Founder of Her Spark, Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to supporting girls in STEM, and Taylor Shine, a creative marketing strategist and Communications and Community Engagement Manager at Google, weigh in on tech-adjacency and the value of working in tech.

What does it mean to be tech-adjacent?

Bradford: There are many roles that serve as catalysts for innovation and technology. Being tech-adjacent is one that supports technological innovation.

Shine: Tech-adjacent roles can be defined as non-technical roles, such as marketing, customer support, etc.

Have you seen tech adjacency in the workplace?

Bradford: Definitely. If there's technology, there's a place to enable it. I'm tech-adjacent – a business person, strategist and industry consultant; I support technology as an operations and strategy expert.

Shine: Tech needs diverse roles and talents. Nontechnical roles have been influential disruptors and industry changers. From graphic design to go-to-market strategy, tech adjacency is crucial to success

Has tech affected you personally?

Bradford: Technology is scientific knowledge and innovation. It exists in everyday life and we use its applied knowledge to make life easier, everything we use is tech-based.

Shine: I'm the ultimate tech problem solver, brought in to close gaps and connect the dots

What would you tell others about getting into tech?

Bradford: If you want to pursue a tech career, leverage your network. If there's a particular certificate or degree that you need, investigate how you can obtain those credentials. If a space doesn't exist in technology, create that space yourself. Leverage your social media network and find folks doing the things you want to. If there isn't an avenue, investigate how you can create one and reach out for support.

Shine: Be intentional! It's always helped me to have a clear intention and goal. I knew I wanted to create impact and bring purpose into my career. Every project, pitch, or campaign starts with intention.

How does someone pursue a career in tech?

Bradford: If a role requires specific certification or certain degrees, investigate how to obtain them. Leverage your network to enter the tech fields you're interested in.

Shine: For non-technical roles, know your transferable skills and how they add value to a company, product, or initiative. You can gauge you strengths and what you want to develop.

What makes tech worth pursuing?

Bradford: Technology is never going away. It's woven into every aspect of our lives.

Shine: Tech provides endless opportunities to add value and innovate.

What closing thoughts do you have on technology?

Bradford: If your career path and passions align with anything in STEM and tech, reach out to you network. If there isn't an opportunity, create your own avenue.

Shine: Unique talents, approach, and creativity are assets to the industry. Don't be intimidated by tech, we need you!





ress bradiord

Taylor Shine

EMERGING TRENDS TAYLOR SHEAD

Interviewer: Junae Benne Interviewee: Taylor Shead

STEMuli - where education meets the metaverse - is brought to you by Taylor Shead. Taylor is no stranger to the struggles of getting the right tools to succeed in the math and science fields. A former med student, she enrolled in all the necessary courses to follow her dreams of becoming a plastic surgeon. During chemistry class, Taylor realized she didn't have the skills to begin her career of choice. As a D1 basketball player, she was traveling a lot and didn't have the resources to complete her work. Taylor says, "If I grew up in a middle-class family, with all the resources in Texas, I know others are struggling," Taylor had a rough patch after getting kicked off her college basketball team.

"Part of my drive was thinking of my legacy... becoming something bigger."

Taylor pushed forward, creating STEMuli, planning to build an 'equity utopia' within the metaverse.

"We want to disrupt the 19th century education model existing in the classroom today and make the opportunity accessible for everyone."

STEMuli presents the metaverse of learning – a unique virtual world – reimagining education in a space where anyone can build and monetize their gamified learning experiences using STEM, the main utility token of the platform.

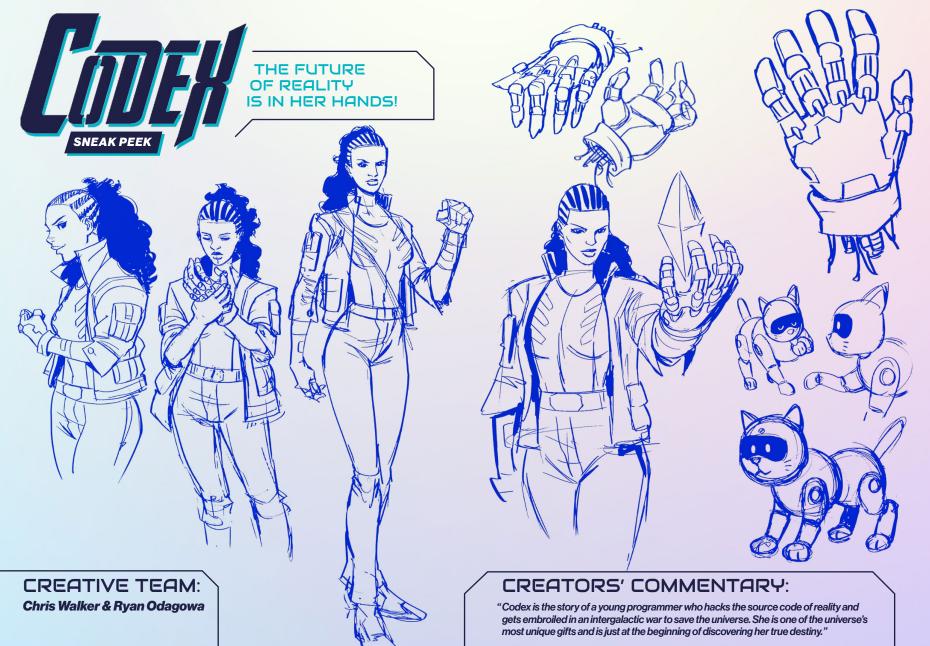
The program, Stimuli, would be integrated into the classroom and extend from 3rd to 12th grade. Students would receive a digital avatar and log in to this world. Through this metaverse, the school—and Taylor's team—can see how often kids attend class, complete assignments, etc.

A shortened cycle of gratification would keep students engaged. They'd earn points which can turn into earning potential--a digital currency that can be cashed out every semester. Students are encouraged to cash out on items to further their education. Another incentive is the Global Business District where students learn about various Fortune 500 companies, i.e. the Dallas Mavericks. After gaining a certain number of points, students could then convert those points to tickets to a



Mavs game. Turning that instant gratification felt while playing a video game would be a positive way to motivate students. Eventually, STEMuli would like to extend the program to collegiate students. STEMuli, is an opportunity for students to create a legacy while monetizing their creations. Taylor says,

"Games are scalable.
Our philosophy is one of education not looking the same and we're going to be a part of the reason it doesn't. We want to change the culture."



SNEAK

PEEK ZERO FUTURE

EVERY GENERATION NEEDS A HERO. THE FUTURE JUST FOUND THEIRS.



CREATIVE TEAM:

Chris Walker & J. J. Kirby

CREATORS' COMMENTARY:

"Set in the distant future, a young mechanic discovers their natural talent for understanding machines is key to unlocking the freedom of the galaxy from the rule of an aging Supreme Chancellor, whose despotic rule has gripped their world for over a century."

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PLAYL 5



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Of the Culture catches up with Stephanie Ijorma of NNESAGA to download on gaming, culture, and the intersection between the two.

What does it mean to be "of the culture" when it comes to gaming?

I've always been into gaming. I started at the age of four and never looked back. My first console was the SNES and, since then, I was sure to try and get the latest consoles/handhelds that were out. I play all kinds of games–RPGs, FPS, platformers, action-adventure, simulators, you name it. I am grateful to my mother who encouraged and invested in my gaming hobby.

How can we help gaming move forward?

By showing the gaming industry we exist and deserve to be at the forefront.

How has NNESAGA helped the culture move forward?

We are helping bring permanent structural changes to a system that has not favored marginalized groups. NNESAGA is the UK's leading Gaming and Entertainment DEI platform and consists of consulting, content, production, events management, workshops, public speaking, and more.

Why the focus on gaming culture?

It's an industry and space that is supposed to be for us, but isn't designed or represented for us.

Where is NNESAGA going next with the culture?

Over the next two years, we want the NNESAGA slogan 'Impact over numbers' to fully integrate into campaigns and be the direct driving force that will change and influence brands to work with more marginalized talent.

Stephanie ljorma





PORTRAITS

JOURNALISTS RESHAPING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT TECHNOLOGY AND OUR WORLD

Illustrations by CHUCKPCOMICS





SYDETTE HARRY

An eye-opening storyteller who challenges the idea of leaving marginalized communities behind, while lifting the voice of the Black Innovation economy. As the founder of the Plug, Sherrell makes sure tech includes the voices of the communities it serves.

SHERELL DORSEY

Cultural critic. Writer.
Troublemaker. These words only begin to spark the conversations Sydette's work tirelessly explores. Her articles sit at the intersection of technology, media, and culture, striving to build a more accessible future, where everyone can see themselves reflected.



MEGAN ROSE DICKEY

As the world of tech connects business sectors and people across the globe, the need for diversity and inclusion is not lost to Megan. Her passion for this cross section of life and tech ignites her passion for IoT, music, startups, and more, creating stories that speak to all.



SAMARA LYNN

Samara's passion for technology flows from her mind and words to connect readers. Her dedication to the world of Information Technology drives stories, business analysis, and content strategies for magazines and news bureau across media and tech.

CEO FEATURE I REGINA GWYNN BLACK WOMEN TECH TALK

Black women have always been leaders when it comes to building their communities. Black Women Talk Tech (BWTT) continues this tradition by crafting a wellspring of resources for entrepreneurial Black women creating techbased businesses.

"We're a collective of Black women...
entrepreneurs focused on building billion-dollar
businesses. Since 2017, we've been dedicated
to helping women acquire generational wealth
through entrepreneurship," explained BWTT
co-founder Regina Gwynn.

While Regina acknowledges there are many ways to build financial wealth and security, BWTT is focused on tech and entrepreneurship for a reason.

"The 2008-2009 recession showed us that no job is safe. Eminent domain could, theoretically, take your real estate. Someone could build a highway through your town. We choose to envision wealth-building through entrepreneurship because, when you create that LLC, everyone has to acknowledge, legally, that it's yours. Focusing on entrepreneurship and technology in particular, allows us an opportunity to leapfrog," she elaborates.

Regina's journey into the tech field was untraditional. Spending her early career in marketing for women's ready-to-wear fashion and beauty, she saw her experiences as a Black woman with natural hair in corporate America as an opportunity to create on her own. She observed the natural hair revolution and wanted to be involved.

"We live in a society that wasn't designed for us," she explains. "I've watched this cultural shift, and saw the associated pain points. I said, 'How can I use technology to find a different way of addressing the hairstyling experience?"

Her first venture created Tresse Noir, an ondemand, on-location beauty booking app for women of color. It launched in 2014 in Philadelphia, before expanding to DC, LA, and Dallas. The company received backing from Coventure VC and Arlan Hamilton (Backstage Capital). It also participated in startup accelerator programs at Google and Backstage Capital.



Even with all these resources and investments, Regina struggled with how to scale the business.

"With scrappiness and grit...you can reach a certain point. But how do you get from a hundred thousand to five million in revenue? Those are the tips that aren't shared and the impetus behind creating BWTT, because I've met other co-founders who had the same problems," she explains.

Building An Audience

"Hosting our first conference in 2017, it was all word of mouth from our fellow founders we were connected to through social [media] and email. Mainly email because these were personal friends. We were calling in favors."

Despite all the support from her network, Regina is still awed by the sheer magnitude of the current BWTT community. "As founders ourselves, we tell an authentic story. We know the grind and can speak to it in a very intimate way," she points out.

COVID-19 Pivot

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges for BWTT. It had to learn how to transition its community to a fully virtual environment.

"We always focused on having in-person connections. When building relationships with investors on your fundraising journey, it makes sense to build that trust in person. Then COVID hit and everything changed," Regina explained.

"The biggest challenge was, in the absence of a Friends and Family round, founders were using revenue to fund their businesses. If your revenue streams get cut, you get shut down, now you don't have anything," she continues.

The BWTT team spent hours helping business owners apply for PPP loans or any kind of assistance to keep them afloat. However, with limited resources, they had to make tough decisions about where to direct their attention.

"We had to focus on the businesses we felt confident would survive." she adds.

This meant saying no to some that weren't mature enough to benefit appreciably from their services.

VC Funding vs Bootstrapping

Regina understands the allure of getting venture capital backing and implores founders to think about their long-term vision when deciding what kind of funding they need.

"I'm a fan of bootstrap and angel investing. It's more founder-friendly. There should be a conversation around what the founders want. To build a business to IPO? To run the next Procter & Gamble? Or own the next Ford? Understanding those decisions will guide your fundraising journey. Taking VC will not put you on a path to ownership in the long term," Regina explains. She also stresses profitability should be a key part of one's strategy.

"We need venture and good venture funds that are founder-friendly. Many venture funds aren't founder-friendly, and don't care," she continues, "You will have higher profitability and a higher valued company when you make money."

Building in Public

For new startups, Regina recommends being strategic about what to share with the world. While there are some aspects of building in which transparency is essential, oversharing can hinder a company's growth.

"It might be advantageous to be public at certain stages of your growth, especially in the beginning when you're just learning...you're just introducing yourself to your audience and to potential clients. But, as you're scaling, it's hard. When you're public with all of the failures it can definitely be demoralizing," Regina cautions.

She continues, "What I don't like is someone only talking about the good things, because when you're only public about the wins, that creates a false narrative. There's got to be a bit of back and forth. I've failed publicly. It builds character and puts a lot into perspective. I can't sit here and say that it's always good to be public with everything because this journey is difficult. Protect your peace, mental health, and self-care. Social media can be the devil sometimes and I'm mindful of picking and choosing opportunities."

Differentiating Friend vs Foe

In a world of social media "experts", it's difficult for a first-time founder to discern between who has their best interests at heart and who doesn't. Before investing large amounts of money or time into any venture, Regina has a few recommendations for newbies:

"I'm a big fan of testing. I'm like, 'Let me test \$100 or what can I get for \$50?' What's the dollar amount that I'm comfortable letting go of? So, if it doesn't work, it's no harm, no foul. There's something to be said about being cautious, especially in the beginning," she says, adding, "If it looks too good to be true, it is."

When it comes to vetting people in the business, she suggests using your network to gather data.

"Go to LinkedIn. Who do you know that knows them? Does someone you trust trust them? Then maybe consider it. I'm at the point where I'm assuming every email is spam unless they come through a validated channel. Misinformation has exploded in the past several years," Regina concludes.

DANIELLE ROSE

POWER HOUSE



PHAEDRA ELLIS-LAMKINS

DEFENDER

Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins, aka the DEFENDER, is a fearless champion of equitable realities for those who need them most. From Green initiatives to championing music rights to cofounding Promise, a FinTech company alleviating the stress of paying off debt, Phaedra combines her courage and resolve to fight for others.

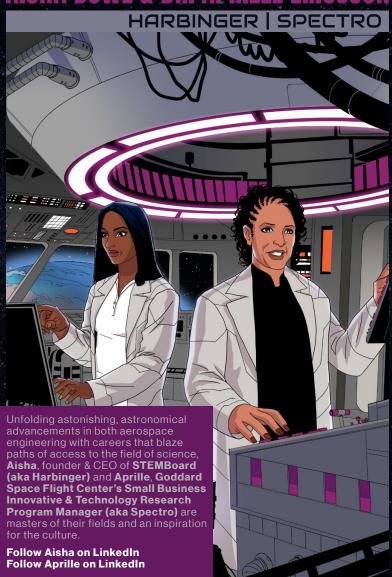
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UNPAGKED

Black women are living in the future by their innovation in tech, from using technology in healthcare to discover cures for cancer, to lifestyle brands that leverage apps for on-demand service, to saving lives with technology that helps 911 calls find the best response for non-emergency calls.

When I did Black Girl Tech Day, I learned that just making the space for Black women in tech is powerful in and of itself—a space to be vulnerable, to see other women on their journeys, and to learn about other women who have successfully taken the journey and are making a difference.

For many Black women founders, the community we build and the camaraderie we create are important. So when you do get funding, when you start to scale, when you make your break in a large organization, you have a support system and know what to do.

So many of the Black women in tech I meet are free thinkers, bold enough to find solutions to problems we all have experienced, and using tech to solve them. When I think about Black women in tech, I think of someone who is embarking on new horizons, who is not only creative but innovative, the kind of person who is going out to venture into the unknown and make a mark for themselves.

These bold thinkers just need the opportunity to come together, to rally behind one another's innovation, and to showcase their work. You are experiencing one of those showcases. I hope you enjoy it!

—JADE





"Exploring various Black women in tech with Urbanime February 2022 has been amazing, inspiring, and uplifting."



"Working with the Urbanime team has been a blast. I loved highlighting these amazing stories of Black entrepreneurs and ingenuity. I hope you love reading them as much as I loved hearing them!"

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