Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries
and the Evolution of Institutional Diversity Work

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ABSTRACT

The business case for diversity is one that argues for the investment into diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives through the promises of increased revenue, reduced litigative risk, enhanced corporate purpose, and becoming an employer of choice. While producing a well-spring of initiatives and programs that seek to demonstrate an organization's commitment to diversity, the success of the business case is held back by a history of ambiguity that interrupts its intentions to celebrate and include historically underrepresented communities in the corporate environment. With a long history of white institutional privilege, diversity in the U.S. has always held the intention to decenter and de-privilege whiteness. The ambiguity with which U.S. case law, and subsequent institutional diversity policies, address the cadence of integration and inclusion of underrepresented groups has yielded the maintenance of white privilege rather than dismantling it. This thesis explores the next evolution of institutional diversity work in Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries (BEIs), organizations that function as cultural brokers between white, corporate institutions and historically underrepresented communities. BEIs leverage their credibility within both of these existing communities to provide access, to create opportunity and accountability for structural change around diversity, equity and inclusion. Using the case studies of Jopwell and ADCOLOR, I analyze interviews with the founders of each organization to explore how they conceptualizes diversity and the communities that they serve. My findings suggest that these founders develop credibility for their organizations by way of early socio-economic access, allowing them to leverage private, corporate networks for success as cultural brokers between white organizations and underrepresented communities populations. The intention of this study is to provide a space for imagining an alternative way of thinking about and doing diversity in a way that enacts structural changes that dismantles white institutional privilege.

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INTRODUCTION

Earlier this year I attended a "Black History themed" corporate happy hour at Weber Shandwick's New York office. This culminating event came at the end of a week full of diversity initiatives aimed at celebrating "known and unknown" Black owned businesses and inventors. The event featured a spread of assorted snacks, including brightly colored candies and stale chips, varied wines and beers from previous client endeavors. Wedged in between the icy chests of beer was a small 8 ½ x 11 frame, picturing a traffic light, captioned with Garret Augustus Morgan's name as the inventor. On the opposite side of the room there were three similar display frames. The first showed a collage of popular Black owned brand logos, including JET, Ace of Spades, Tyler Perry and Harpo Studios, Essence, and FUBU. Another featured a picture of a super soaker water gun, invented by an un-pictured Lonnie G. Johnson. The final display featured three popular Black-owned beauty brands: Carol's Daughter, Shea Moisture and Ginger + Liz Nail Lacour. Beneath the display were 3 sample products from each brand: *Carol's Daughter* Black Vanilla Edge Control Smoother, *Shea Moisture* Strengthen & Restore Edge Treatment, and the 'Menswear' Black nail lacquer from *Ginger + Liz*.[1] Later I would learn that this celebration was created and executed by a Black woman, who serves as the head of the diversity committee at the firm. With or without the input or approval from senior leadership, this sort of unimaginative celebration is common in corporate America and communicates a troubling message about how Blackness is valued and perceived by the organization. As I walked back to my desk, I began to question why corporate diversity celebrations like this Black History themed happy hour are offensive more often than they are authentic. I wondered why the celebration of diversity always so dissatisfying.

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[1] See Appendix. Figures 1.1 – 1.4.

This dissatisfaction originates from the discomfort and transparency that is required for taking the step beyond a stated commitment to DEI. The aims of institutional diversity work are often thwarted by the inability to question and explore why diversity work is needed in the first place. This history of institutional whiteness is based on a system of socio-economic privilege that has led to, among other things, institutional underrepresentation, inequality and discrimination that are reinforced through corporate events that center objects like super soakers and traffic lights over their inventors and provide edge control treatments as the triumph of modern Black[2] creation. It is this thinking that employs tokenism in favor of critical evaluation to produce a more radical institutional change. This tempered form of diversity work builds into organizational practices and policies to brew dissatisfaction and discontent among those for whom the celebration of diversity was intended. Even with the best intentions, it seems that organizations can never seem to get the celebration quite right, unable to acknowledge or untangle the various institutional systems that protect and encourage white privilege.

This thesis exploration begins at a tension that is first curious about the legacy of institutional diversity efforts to date, dating back before the passage of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity legislation up to the relatively present-day era of the business case for diversity. Initiatives like the Black history themed happy hour, on the one hand represent decades of work and sacrifice that have allowed underrepresented stakeholders to build a presence in white dominated spaces. Diversity celebrations are valuable in that they attempt to offer representation for Black innovation and life within homogeneous spaces. The tension arises

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[2] Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. (1988) "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law." *Harvard Law Review* 101, no. 7 (1988): 1331-387. DOI: 10.2307/1341398. Following the work of Kimberle Crenshaw and a litany of other Black scholars, I capitalize the work "Black" throughout the paper as a proper noun that not only references "a specific cultural group" as Crenshaw suggests but also as a practice for reclaiming space for the cultural, political and economic experiences that are ubiquitous in its use.

as this thesis exploration questions whether anything more can be accomplished with the current corporate rhetoric of institutional diversity work. Company offerings and programming that trivialize and stereotype difference inevitably choke the progress that has been made to date. The failed celebrations of diversity represent a fundamental misunderstanding about the historic intentions of diversity work to radically change institutional privilege and representation. Instead the target audience of corporate diversity efforts are asked to be grateful for celebrations that don't celebrate them, but instead offer a congratulatory check on an organization's list of accomplishments. This thesis is born out of the opportunities afforded by a legacy of institutional diversity efforts, but like many I believe that there is more work to be done to allow diversity to take on its intended purpose of radical institutional change.

This study builds on the theoretical frame of three scholars. Cheryl Harris (1993) builds the case for white privilege as a form of property rights that are protected through U.S. law. She extends this consideration to academic institutions and affirmative action legislation, offering numerous examples of the ways in which U.S. law defaults to and protects whiteness.[3] Harris ends her analysis by offering a way to restore the radical intentions of legislation like affirmative action, by removing the ambiguity and deference to whiteness and white institutional privilege. Sarah Ahmed (2012) examines the rhetoric of institutional diversity in the university setting. She provides that the abstruse language of diversity leads to a reliance on the aesthetics of difference rather than critical intervention that diversity should offer.[4] Together, Harris and Ahmed offer that the failure of diversity from *Plessy v Ferguson, to* affirmative action, and into the present business case, is due to their failure to acknowledge and engage with the historical power relations that make diversity work necessary. Finally, Susan Sturm (2007) provides a helpful

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[3] Harris, C. (1993). Whiteness as Property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707-1791. doi:10.2307/1341787
[4] Ahmed, S. (2012). On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life. *Duke University Press*

framework for imagining an alternative to the current corporate rhetoric of institutional diversity work.[5] Sturm conceptualizes organizational catalysts and institutional intermediaries, both of which offer a way to circumvent the institution's default to whiteness by helping to maintain an organizational focus on diversity and inclusion through entrepreneurial actors and external partners.[6] Synthesizing Sturm's concepts of organizational catalysts and institutional intermediaries, this study puts forth Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries as an evolution of institutional diversity work. Like organizational catalysts and institutional intermediaries, Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries are information entrepreneurs with their pulse on diversity. These organizations use their professional capital and credibility to create communities and accountability around institutional diversity. They are typically majority minority organizations with a direct focus on diversity and inclusion. BEIs are also largely dependent on corporate partnerships and funding, creating a complicated relationship between white institutions, BEIs and the communities that are the intended beneficiaries of institutional diversity work. BEIs function as cultural brokers, offering a 'for us, by us' alternative to the business case diversity and a means of imagining a new celebration.

To explore the work of BEIs and how they differ from the current form of institutional diversity work, I examine two organizations, Jopwell and ADCOLOR. Jopwell is a tech startup that partners with companies to improve their recruitment of underrepresented ethnic minority candidates. Launched in 2015 by Porter Braswell and Ryan Williams, Jopwell provides a digital platform for corporate recruiters to connect with Black, Latinx, and Native American professionals. ADCOLOR is a non-profit organization that champions diversity and inclusion in

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[5] Sturm, S. P. (2006). The Architecture of Inclusion: Advancing Workplace Equity in Higher Education. *Harvard Journal of Law & Gender,* Vol. 29, No. 2; Columbia Public Law Research Paper No. 06-114.
[6] Sturm, 5 - 6.

advertising, marketing and media. Beginning in 2005 as an annual awards ceremony, ADCOLOR has become the largest, most recognized cross-discipline diversity and inclusion initiative for creative industries.[7] In addition to their annual conference, ADCOLOR also offers professional development for early tenure professionals as well as training and workshops to interrogate and improve corporate culture. Like Jopwell, ADCOLOR depends on corporate sponsorships to provide and develop their offering. These organizations represent a budding subset of organizations that are responding to the call of institutional diversity work as entrepreneurial intermediaries. They serve as an information resource for and about historically underrepresented groups, they provide a space for creating community around diversity, equity and inclusion, and they create systems for accountability for white institutions. Through a textual analysis of interviews with the founders of Jopwell and ADCOLOR, this thesis explores how these organizations define diversity and who is considered diverse, and how they differentiate themselves and their offerings from corporate diversity as enacted by white organizations. Just as Harris reimagines affirmative action, I'm eager to find evidence of an alternative to the current ambiguity in institutional diversity work. I began this exploration with the hopes of offering a solution to the incongruity of institutional work and Blackness. I sought to find a way to soothe the tension that I feel in my own personal experience with institutional diversity that favors a stated commitment over structural change. Jopwell and ADCOLOR represent a hopeful step in that direction, removing the obscurity and adding external accountability to institutional diversity work.

This study unfolds in several parts. Chapter one lays the foundation of diversity in U.S. case law that establishes diversity as a legal mandate. This legacy is deeply entrenched in the

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[7] ADCOLOR (2020). Partnership Guide.
http://adcolor.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/03/ADCOLOR_Partnership_Guide_2020.pdf.

history of race and power in this country and is bled into all work to create and celebrate diversity in present day institutions. Through ambiguity this narrative of diversity as compliance leaves space for inaction. In its primary focus on representation and aesthetics, compliance era diversity fails to address institutional power and the white privilege that diversity intends to dismantle. In Chapter two, I discuss the impact of diversity as legal compliance and its ambiguity with the form and speed of social change. Where affirmative action and employment discrimination law seeks to address and disengage whiteness from institutional privilege, they do not go far enough to direct its destruction. This shortcoming is then built into later iterations of diversity work that do not address racial power dynamics, failing to as Harris suggests, address the full measure of harm.[8] This is the present corporate era of institutional diversity work that presents diversity as a line item on a company's bill for success. Chapter three explores Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries as the latest iteration of institutional diversity work, created in response to the stalled offerings of the business case for diversity, revealing what this evolution of institutional diversity has to offer. Through Jopwell and ADCOLOR case studies, I offer a cautious optimism about what's next for institutional diversity work. In the final chapter, I question the nature of evolution that BEIs offer as they serve as cultural brokers, leveraging credibility developed by early access to private corporate networks as well as an authenticity through connections with Blackness and other underrepresented communities.

CHAPTER ONE: Diversity as Legal Compliance

Historically, business institutions are white, held up through protections built into U.S. law and institutional policy. Diversity and inclusion efforts begin as the law begins to mandate

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[8] Harris, 1751.

the inclusion of Black people, recently emancipated from chattel slavery. These legal mandates were frequently challenged in the U.S. court system which pointed to the exclusion of whiteness in early efforts to diversity and inclusion efforts. This resulted in a maintenance of white institutional privilege within laws and policies that were intended to decenter whiteness and question the status quo. This would set the tone for future iterations of institutional diversity work, offering a tempered radical intervention into institutions whose policies and procedures continue to protect white privilege and comfort.

Following the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, a decade's long battle would begin within the Courts and the Executive Branches, that sought to mandate racial equality within the U.S. public sphere. State and local legislation, such as the Southern Black Codes, would immediately seek to undo the rights extended by the Thirteenth Amendment by re-instating slavery era social codes. Passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments would attempt to redress Southern Black Codes by explicitly extending "full and equal benefit of all laws," as well as the right to vote to all those born in the U.S., regardless of race or color or previous status.[9] Pushes for equal rights would continue between 1870 and 1871 would occur with a series of Civil Rights Acts, also known as the Ku Klux Klan Acts or Enforcement Acts, aimed at quelling acts of terrorism committed by the KKK against Black Americans. These acts outlawed "domestic violence" meant to deny or discourage the rights, privileges, immunities or protections offered by the Constitution to all persons in public spaces.[10] These small battle would culminate with the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), as an attempt to legal outlaw

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[9] The House Joint Resolution proposing the 13th amendment to the Constitution, January 31, 1865; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1999; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives. (Thirteenth Amendment); The House Joint Resolution proposing the 14th amendment to the Constitution, June 16, 1866; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1999; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives. (Fourteenth Amendment)

[10] Cresswell, Stephen (1987). "Enforcing the Enforcement Acts: The Department of Justice in Northern Mississippi, 1870–1890," Journal of Southern History, 53:3: 421 - 444.

racial segregation. The Court's ruling however would roll back protections for Black Americans in the public sphere by declaring that "equal but separate" facilities were legal under the Constitution.[11] In describing the preceding incident, the court record states:

> [P]etitioner was a citizen of the United States and a resident of the state of Louisiana of mixed descent, in the proportion of seven eighths Caucasian and one eighth African blood; that the mixture of colored blood was not discernible in him, and that he was entitled to every recognition, right, privilege and immunity secured to the citizens of the United States of the white race by its Constitution and laws.[12]

This suggests that any connection to Blackness disqualifies a person from the rights of U.S. citizens and offers total protection as well as fiscal benefit to whiteness under the law. Cheryl Harris (1993) helps to clarify the origins of the relationship between whiteness and legal, cultural and economic power in the U.S.[13] The early conflation of race and social status at the installation of chattel slavery created the socio-economic foundation for white supremacy that is continually solidified through the law. Harris explains that "the law assumed the crucial task of racial classification, and accepted and embraced the then-current theories of race as biological fact."[14] By accepting race as fact, color becomes a primary determinant in establishing social status as well as human rights. The early social strata in the U.S. was composed of white and Black, that would later be mapped onto the rhetoric of the 'slave' or 'property' versus the 'free' or 'property owner.'[15] The Black and white dichotomy gets written into the state sanctioned language of slave versus free, dictating restricted access for slaves (and former slaves) to basic human rights to

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[11] Supreme Court of the United States. U.S. Reports: Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537. 1895. Periodical. https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep163537/.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Harris, C. (1993). Whiteness as Property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707-1791.
[14] Harris, "The Property Functions of Whiteness." 1731 - 37.
[15] Harris, "Forms of Racialized Property: Relationships Between Slavery, Race and Property." 1716 - 20.

education, property ownership, public assembly and travel.[16] Harris underscores the relationship

of race to property as the basis of white privilege. She explains that whiteness becomes the only

means of differentiating the free from the enslaved, and where slaves have no right to ownership,

whiteness becomes the primary feature of public access and entitlement.[17] The social

expectations of whiteness are then affirmed through a number of Supreme Court cases. *Plessy*

serves as one of the earliest examples of U.S. case law that offer explicit protections for white

privilege.[18] Beyond endorsing state sanctioned racial segregation, *Plessy* also assigned a

particular socio-economic value to whiteness. Harris provides, "because phenotypically [Homer]

Plessy appeared to be white, barring him from the railway car reserved for whites severely

impaired or deprived him of the reputation of being regarded as white.[19] In the final opinion,

moving swiftly to affirm racial segregation, the Court considers the course of action if Plessy has

been white.[20] The Court concludes that, "if he be a white man and assigned to a colored coach,

he may have his action for damages against the company for being deprived of his so-called

property," going on to suggest if the reverse were true that there would be no denial of property

since colored men are not "lawfully entitled to the reputation of being a white man."[21] This

opinion sets up what Harris calls, "the valuable asset of being regarded white" through use and

enjoyment as well as status and reputation.[22] While whiteness is never explicitly defined, *Plessy*

clearly articulates the legal protection of whiteness as a form of status and reputation.

Sixty years later *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954 -1955) would

reverse the *Plessy* ruling stating that "separate educational facilities were inherently unequal."[23]

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Harris, "Forms of Racialized Property: Relationships between Native American Lands Seizure, Race and Property." 1721 - 23.
[18] Harris, "Plessy." 1746 - 49.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 1954.

Harris explains that Court's the rejection of state sanctioned racial segregation equally rejects the property rights of whiteness that were established in the *Plessy* ruling.[24] The first *Brown* decisions succeeded in demonizing white supremacy and racial subordination. The second *Brown* decision provides that the dismantling of white privilege should take place with "all deliberate speed," leaving space for unwilling school districts to decide when racial integration would take place.[25] The failure of both *Brown* decisions lies in their ambiguous vision for the end of racial segregation.[26] Harris explains that in the Court's ultimate unwillingness to dictate the exact pace of social change, the *Brown* decisions "failed to address the full measure of harm."[27] The rhetoric of "all deliberate speed" gives deference and control to whiteness to determine the pace of social changes that conveniently never interferes with the continued maintenance of white supremacy and white comfort. In essence, the *Brown* decisions dictate that racial segregation and subordination are outlawed so long as they do not interfere with the material privileges of whiteness.[28] Rather than dictated the immediate dismantling of white supremacy (through racial segregation and subordination), the Court allows "whiteness to control, manage, postpone, and if necessary, thwart change."[29] By upholding the privilege of whiteness to own the pace of social change, the *Brown II* decision maintains its deference towards the comfort and power of whiteness versus balancing socio-economic inequality.

The legacy of the *Plessy* and *Brown* decisions establishes a new norm for U.S.-American society that re-conceptualizes the white-free, Black-slave dichotomy. What takes over is an equally sinister conceptualization of whiteness as more and Blackness as less. Racial inequality

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[24] Harris, "Brown I." 1750 - 53.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Harris, "Brown II." 1754 - 55.

comes to represent a new normal, where Blackness is automatically associated with less access, less opportunity and less resources; whiteness is then looked upon to share or ration its privilege.[30] Under this new conception, the racial subordination of Blackness is no longer justified through the debunked science of phrenology and eugenics, but rather through the affirmation of white privilege through legal statutes; most often the privilege manifests as access to property and associated social status.[31] Harris argues that the "perpetuation of institutional privilege" and neutrality of whiteness is maintained from *Plessy* to *Brown* and remains present through affirmative action legislation.[32]

Affirmative action is established and defined through several pieces of legislation. The fourth Civil Rights Act passed in 1957 establish the Civil Rights Commission aimed at creating federal oversight to protect the rights of Black Americans.[33] Still met with violent opposition, the crescendo of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s would bring the final push of legislation passed to create racial equity in the public sphere. President Kennedy's 1961 Executive Order would establish the federal requirement for "affirmative action," as actions taken by employers to prevent discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, or national origin.[34] Four years later Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would extend mandates for affirmative action to all employers while also expanding the authority of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and creating judicial retribution for non-compliance.[35] Similar to the effect of the "all deliberate speed" language of *Brown II* decision, foundational affirmative action legislation maintained the ambiguity of antidiscrimination legislation passed particularly

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[30] Harris, "Brown's Mixed Legacy." 1756.
[31] Harris, "The Persistence of Whiteness as Valued Social Identity" 1757 - 58.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Civil Rights Act of 1957, 85 P.L. 315, 71 Stat. 634.
[34] Executive Order 10925 of 1961, Establishing The President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity" 26 FR 1977, Section 301-1. https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/thelaw/eo-10925.html.
[35] Title VI of The Civil Rights Act of 1964. 42 U.S.C. § 2000d, et seq. https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.

between 1961 and 1971 creating space for weak enforcement of the laws and therefore providing a justification for inaction.[36] Terms like 'affirmative action' and 'discrimination' are not explicitly defined within the confines of the law.[37] Dobbin marks a shift in 1971 with another landmark Supreme Court case, *Griggs v. Duke Power Company* in which Black employees at the Dan River Steam Station in North Carolina challenged their employers' use of intelligence tests as a condition of employment, promotion and transfer.[38] The 6-3 decision explains that "good intent or absence of discriminatory intent does not redeem employment procedures or testing mechanisms that operate as "built-in headwinds," for minority groups and are unrelated to measuring job capability," effectively placing the burden of proof on employers to demonstrate "special efforts" to help minority groups in the workplace.[39] Under the threat of litigative action, made real by the *Griggs* decision, employers would begin to hire equal employment opportunity specialists and establish affirmative action plans to demonstrate compliance.[40]

Though initially aimed at workplace inclusion, affirmative action also established mandates for educational institutions. Universities would also become an institutional environment under which affirmative action could be challenged. Harris explains two Supreme Court challenges: *Regents of University of California* v. *Bakke* and *City of Richmond v J.A. Croson Co.*﹣would chip away at the powerful mandate of affirmative action legislation that effectively called for the dismantling of white institutional privilege.[41] Each of the cases, in effect, challenge the remedial measures of affirmative action, by suggesting that quotas for

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[36] Dobbin, F. & Kelly, E. (1998). How Affirmative Action Became Diversity Management Employer Response To Antidiscrimination Law 1961 to 1996. A*merican Behavioral Scientist*, 41(7): p. 963 - 64.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 1971.
[40] Dobbin, "Expanded Enforcement and Employer Response: 1972 - 1980." 964 - 66.
[41] Harris, "Subordination Through Affirmative Action Doctrine." 1766 - 77.

Blacks, "is an economic threat to whites," by denying social privileges. Regents *of University of California v. Bakke* was the Supreme Court's first opportunity to assess the affirmative action doctrine through the challenge of a white male applicant who claimed that he had been subject to reverse racism by being denied admission in favor of a Black applicant.[42] Using the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, the plaintiff provided that the affirmative action "denied future white applicants the opportunity" for admission.[43] The Court's decision, in favor of Bakke, provided that the white male applicant was "better qualified" due to a select number of admissions criteria (i.e. test scores and GPA).[44] The Court's opinion also puts forth the notion of colorblindness in institutional decision making, suggesting that race-conscious decision making reduces the expected privileges of whiteness.[45] Just as the *Plessy* and *Brown* decisions weigh whiteness and white comfort over the ability of Blacks to participate equitably in society, *Bakke* similarly sympathizes with whiteness.[46] In *City of Richmond v J.A. Croson Co.,* a white contractor challenged the legality of Richmond's minority business program under the Equal Protection Clause.[47] The program essentially mandated that 30% of the city's budget be spent with minority-owned businesses. The plaintiff provided that this impeded his ability to obtain contracts with the city. The Court's opinion held that Richmond's minority program was unjustified, despite the overwhelming evidence of racial discrimination.[48] The final decision held that "whites cannot be burdened with rectifying inequities that are the product of history."[49] Harris explains that the *Croson* decision allows whites to be treated as any other racial identity

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] *City of Richmond v J.A. Croson Co*, (1989).
[49] Ibid.

that has access to the Equal Protection Clause, historically established to rebalance hyper-valuation of whiteness.[50]

Bakke and Croson reshape the public understanding of affirmative action, not as a means to redress racial subordination and discrimination, but as a threat to white privilege.[51] Bakke overlooks the systematic oppression tied to institutional policies and procedures for the sake of white privilege as well as putting forth colorblindness without challenging the allegiance that it offers to whiteness. Croson legitimizes the rhetoric of reverse racism, offering whiteness a flawed access to the same law designed to protect minority groups from the effects of racial subordination. For Harris, the failure of the affirmative action doctrine and related Supreme Court challenges lies in its sympathy and effective preservation of the social, political and economic benefits of whiteness.

In concluding, Harris imagines how affirmative action might be able to take on its intention for "rethinking rights, power, equality, race and property."[52] Through legal challenges and the ambiguity with which the statue addresses the history of racial subordination, the application of affirmative action focuses more on equal protection of whiteness rather than questioning the inequity.[53] Where affirmative action has previously been misinterpreted as a law that offers compensation to minorities, Harris provides that the law is distributive, in that it focuses on entitlement and fairness.[54] Where challenges to affirmative action, like Bakke and Croson, represent a fear of Black or minority supremacy, Harris provides that it simply represents a leveling of the playing field rather than a complete polar shift.[55] If affirmative action

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[50] Harris, "Subordination Through Affirmative Action Doctrine." 1766 - 77.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Harris, "Delegitimizing the Property Interests in Whiteness Through Affirmative Action." 1777 - 81.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Harris, "Corrective Justice, Sin and Whiteness as Property." 1781 - 84.
[55] Harris, "Affirmative Action: A New Form of Status Property." 1784 - 86.

were to be removed from its polarized and fear-driven context, Harris imagines that it may be permitted to begin the work of dismantling white supremacy.[56]

Harris' analysis of the legal justification for white supremacy illuminates several key concepts for this thesis. To begin, it must be made clear that whiteness is a collective identity that is produced and reproduced by the social advantages that accompany it.[57] *Plessy* established the fiscal value of whiteness by suggesting that a white passenger placed in the incorrect class would be entitled to damages from the rail company. Further valuation of whiteness can be found in any instance of passing, where those of non-white identity, seek to utilize whiteness to attain access to social privileges.[58] Secondly, the *Brown* decisions gave whiteness control over the speed of social change, allowing the dominant group to determine when and whether the system that protects their power would be dismantled. In thinking about the ways in which Harris' analysis maps into the present day, the same struggle to integrate predominantly white institutions continues to be thwarted by the need to protect white comfortability. Diversity programs and initiatives aimed at increasing representation of underrepresented groups are often derailed by the need to ensure that white stakeholders still feel like they belong.

In 2019, Target CEO Brian Cornell reconfirmed its commitment to increasing supplier diversity, as an effort to engage "multicultural audiences with relevant marketing messages."[59] The Honey Pot Co, a Black woman led company that makes feminine care products with natural, plant-based ingredients, was displayed as a beneficiary of Target's supplier diversity program. In February 2020, Target aired a commercial with Honey Pot's founder and CEO Bea Dixon, celebrating her in-store success and desire to serve as a role model for Black girls who want to

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[56] Harris, What Affirmative Action Has Been; What Affirmative Action Might Become." 1787 - 91.
[57] Harris, "White Legal Identity: The Law's Acceptance and Legitimation of Whiteness as Property." 1737 - 44.
[58] Ibid.
[59] "Diversity & Inclusion." Target Corporation, 2020. https://corporate.target.com/diversity-inclusion.

become business leaders. The initial response to the advertisement was fierce, Target customers took to the company rating website Trustpilot to leave scores of poor reviews citing the Bea Dixon advertisement. Overwhelmingly reviewers termed Target's support of the Honey Pot Co and Bea Dixon as "racist," calling the CEO ungrateful for running with Target's resources to create products exclusively for Black women. Though peppered with false information about how Dixon was given "free money," product design and pricing data. Other reviewers name themselves as white and claim that a reverse circumstance would be "wrong on so many levels."[60] Some also question why race should even matter, when Black people have advanced to the financial level of a white male reviewer. Another reviewer goes as far to suggest the Black people should be grateful for the opportunity to work and access to food and water in America.[61] Just as Harris suggests, social change that threatens the economic potential of whiteness must be problematized. Despite the initial white outrage, Black Twitter users rallied around the brand to report low reviews and replace them with 5-star ratings.[62] Examples like this demonstrate that diversity initiatives and programming often have a way of rattling white comfortability by questioning who is included and considered in an organization's decisions making, culture and offerings. When organizations, like Target, state their commitment to diversity, it should signal the intention to acknowledge that their policies and offerings have historically defaulted towards whiteness. However, just as Harris demonstrates that affirmative action triggers a white fragility by challenging white institutional privilege, present-day diversity efforts upset institutional norms that protect and reproduce organizational advantages for whiteness.

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[60] Trustpilot (2020). (Now deleted review). See Appendix, Figure 2.1 – 2.2.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Throw In the Tile. (2020). "Honey Pot, a black woman owned natural hair care line that's sold in Target, had a commercial where they said they want to empower black girls. Now white women are mad." [Tweet]. https://twitter.com/eleven8/status/1234364222248611840.

Affirmative action begins the very important work of acknowledging and dismantling white privilege and its protection under the law.[63] The legacy of affirmative action passes on an urgency to, as Harris suggests, shed the legacy of oppression and to open a space for imagining consistent norms of equality.[64] In the same token, court challenges that accompany the compliance era of diversity also creates a pattern of protecting white comfortability that slows the attempts to create greater systemic change. Regan era deregulation would further delay the intended promises of affirmative action, by limiting federal oversight and funding. Dobbin (1998) explains that the momentum created during the early part of affirmative action enactment developed "internal constituencies" who would push for continued focus on diversity.[65] Soon the term 'diversity' would become a part of the corporate narrative of competition and innovation.[66] This new rationale for racial (as well as gender) inclusion, steeped in the language of human resources and competitive advantages through talent engagement, provides the early groundwork for today's business case for diversity.

CHAPTER TWO: Business Case for Diversity & Early Diversity Champions

Throughout the late 1980s, affirmative action and equal employment opportunity laws would transform into diversity management and HR practices that promoted training and workplace resources for minority employees.[67] The impact of the *Griggs* decision and it's acknowledgement of the "disparate impact" of racial discrimination opened the door for litigative risk for many employers.[68] In response to the Griggs decision, Dobbin reports that by 1976 many companies established affirmative action and equal employment opportunity

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[63] Harris, "De-legitimating The Property Interest In Whiteness Through Affirmative," 1777 - 87
[64] Ibid.
[65] Dobbin, "Threats to Affirmative Action and Employer Response; 1981 - 1987," 966 - 71.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Dobbin. "Expanded Enforcement and Employer Response: 1972 - 1980." 964 -66.

(AA/EEO) offices to manage and analyze existing practices and procedures to ensure compliance with new guidance.[69] In addition to overseeing compliance, many AA/EEO specialists were also tasked with enacting "proactive affirmative action measures," designed to increase diverse representation; these measures included recruitment programs, manager performance review, race- and gender-conscious training and professional development. This secondary purview would allow for the creation of "internal constituencies of AA/EEO specialists who would fight for the maintenance of antidiscrimination measures," even after Reagan era deregulation.[70] Even through deregulation and de-emphasis of AA/EEO protections, many corporate executives became "cheerleaders for affirmative action," viewing mitigation of litigative risk and negative press as reason enough to advocate for AA/EEO measures. Companies that had already created AA/EEO departments in response to the 1970s regulations, created a breeding ground for diversity champions.

The business case for diversity enters as a corporate discourse and rationale that marries the mandates of the compliance era of diversity with business success. Under this era of diversity work, organizations not only saved themselves from costly financial and reputational scandals but also found a competitive edge through a courtship with diversity.[71] Dobbin provides that under the new business case rationale, that investment in diversity management (or preventing opportunities for AA/EEO litigation) would produce its own benefits.[72] The Financial Executives Research Foundation (FERF) provides that the business case for diversity has 4 major impacts: revenue, risk, reputation, and public perception.[73] With a focus on the outcomes of the business

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid,
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Orenstein, E. G. (2005, May). The Business Case For Diversity: Financial Executives Research Foundation (FERF) Finds A Four-pronged Approach Is Driving Diversity Initiatives Across Corporate America. *Financial Executive*, 21(4), 22.

case for diversity, institutions effectively lose sight of the original intention of diversity which is to decentralize and de-privilege whiteness in the institution.

Institutions are defined by stasis and their ability to create a status quo. In principle, diversity—that is birthed out of numerous attempts at addressing racial subordination and discrimination in the U.S.—becomes tempered upon arrival at the institution. As Harris explains, the consequence of numerous executive and judicial challenges to affirmative action legislation is that white privilege continues to be tied to institutional privilege. Where whiteness is permitted to maintain control over the inclusion of "others," little progress can be made. Ahmed provides that diversity within this framework "becomes a technology for reproducing whiteness: adding color to the white face of the organization confirms the whiteness of that face."[74] Institutional diversity therefore becomes more about aesthetics and representation than systematic, institutional change. As Ahmed suggests, diversity, particularly when inserted and enforced as a result of legal mandates, is viewed as a breach of the institution's stasis, an added requirement that would not have normally been included in the organizational flow.[75] In this way, corporate diversity becomes a tool for re-establishing the status quo of the interior rather than restructuring the interior to create space for others. This framing of diversity within the discourse of problem-solution, places diversity in opposition to institutional goals and creates tension within the organization. While externally purporting to have a commitment to diversity, many organizations do not go deep enough to address the ways that unbalanced race and power dynamics have permeated organizations corporate procedures and culture. As an example, Facebook's latest diversity report touts less than 1.0% increases in non-white, non-heteronormative employees and present the value of having a representatively diverse

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[74] Ahmed, "Speaking About Racism." 141 - 72.
[75] Ibid.

team.[76] The website features a number of Black faces and stories that share a range of polished experiences of feeling included and valued at the company.[77] Since announcing their commitment to address unconscious bias and improve the representation of underrepresented populations in 2015, the company has done little to live up to its stated commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive work environment.[78] In November of 2019, a group of Black Facebook employees published an anonymous letter recounting the ways that Facebook as an organization continues to enable white supremacy and racial discrimination.[79] The letter detailed various instances of macro and micro aggressions against Black employees by managers, co-workers and administrative teams to privately and publicly thwart promotion and inclusion in the workplace, all of which point to a culture that is opposed to inclusion and diversity, especially when it comes to race.

Though anecdotal, Facebook represents the ways in which many corporate business institutions that are struggling with how to implement diversity programs that are effective for not just for outwardly demonstrating the organization's commitment but also do the work to address structural inequities with who is included and supported by the organization. Ahmed (2012) suggests that diversity is often more about fitting difference into an existing institutional flow rather than incorporating difference in a way that changes the organization, whereby talent recruitment practices, for example, function to reproduce sameness that is almost always white.[80] In this way, the business case diversity is much more about the aesthetics of difference rather than evaluating and changing institutional practices that prescribe that diversity. In many ways it

[76] "Read Report | 2019 Diversity Report." Facebook, Inc. 2019. https://diversity.fb.com/read-report.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Finley, T. (2017). Mark Zuckerberg On Lack Of Diversity In Tech: 'That's Our Problem To Figure Out'." *Huffington Post.* https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mark-zuckerberg-on-lack-of-diversity.
[79] FB Blind, (2019). Facebook Empowers Racism. *Medium.* https://medium.com/@blindfb2020.
[80] Ahmed, "Institutional Life." 19 - 50.

seems that diversity, as defined by the U.S. history of inequity and difference, is misaligned with the ultimate goals of the institution; whether business or academic, institutions create a status quo through uniformity, discipline and ritualized practices. Within this paradigm, diversity cannot persist as an intervention, but rather becomes warped into another tool for maintaining the sameness of the institution. Even with the creations of senior executive positions like Chief Diversity Officers and Heads of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, institutional diversity work will not go beyond the aesthetics of difference without directly acknowledging the existence and legacy of white institutional privilege.

Susan Sturm (2007) contends that diversity professionals "face the daunting task of shepherding an institutional change process," often without appropriate resources or support.[81] In her attempt to develop a framework and methodology for inclusive institutions, Sturm provides two useful terms for thinking about corporate diversity. The first are what Sturm calls organizational catalysts, who often but not always appear in organizations as diversity professionals. Regardless of their specific titles, organizational catalysts (OCs) "act as information entrepreneurs and bridge builders at pivot points that can leverage change," arising out of a need to address institutional bias.[82] They provide internal and external knowledge, build community and create accountability of an institution's goals around diversity, equity and inclusion. Sturm explains that senior decision makers are often unaware of the tensions that exist for underrepresented groups at white institutions. OCs are positioned to employ their social capital within an organization to authentically collect information from underrepresented constituencies and inject it into the decision-making process.[83] OCs are attuned to the needs of various stakeholder groups, allowing them to bridge structural holes that prevent or dissuade

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[81] Sturm, "Introduction." 3 - 9.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

inclusion of underrepresented groups within an organization.[84] OCs "mobilize varied forms of knowledge to promote change."[85] Often, they are institutional experts, particularly with regard to organizational processes, structure and strategy. Their authority and credibility allow them to "gather crucial information about micro-level decisions that accumulate to shape access" within the organization.[86] OCs also access and analyze relevant external literature and data on the wider landscape of diversity and inclusion and its impact on business.[87] OCs operate as multifaceted data-hubs for internal and external information to "provide support for innovative approaches to routine practices such as recruitment, selection processes, mentoring, and [stakeholder] support."[88] OCs also foster strategic collaboration. Part of their function "involves cultivating new 'communities of practice' among individuals who share common interests, experiences or concerns but otherwise lack opportunities to connect."[89] OCs often take on the task of coalition building to not only strengthen relationships within an organization but to also provide the right critical space for addressing structural gaps that prevent minority groups from fully engaging at an organization.[90] Finally, OCs perform the role of creating accountability and engagement around diversity goals and efforts. Building on their two additional functions of information gathering and cultivating collaboration, OCs leverage their position to "maintain the institution's focus on [diversity] as part of its core mission."[91] This is done by making issues around diversity an explicit topic of discussion during the decision-making process. Through their diversity directive, OCs help to frame issues around diversity through data and information, they "create

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[84] Sturm, "Organizational Catalysts: Institutional Roles to Sustain Institutional Transformation." 42 - 54.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Sturm, "Organizational Catalysts: Institutional Roles to Sustain Institutional Transformation." 42 - 54.
[91] Ibid.

multiple constituencies for change" at varying levels, and use their social capital and connections to make the process of institutional change easier.[92] The clearest example of organizational catalysts is the now popular position of chief diversity officers (CDOs). SHRM offers that CDOs are often positioned at the intersection of people and organizational mission.[93] Like OCs, CDOs exist at the intersection of different systems within an organization.[94] While the responsibilities of CDOs vary across company and industry, CDOs rely on relationship building to accomplish their goals.[95]

Sturm also provides the concept of "institutional intermediaries" as important leaders in the diversity space. These are "public or quasi-public organizations that leverage their position within preexisting communities of practices to foster change and provide meaningful accountability."[96] Institutional intermediaries represent the ways in which diversity work has evolved from compliance to a business imperative. Like OCs, institutional intermediaries build knowledge, introduce incentives and provide accountability around a given issue.[97] Unlike OCs, institutional intermediaries are often external organizations that partner with internal stakeholders like OCs. Rather than encouraging diversity and inclusion through punitive actions, institutional intermediaries help to establish common metrics and information, introduce competition and institutional improvement, and create reporting and evaluation around diversity and inclusion efforts.

DiversityInc and Black Enterprise have served as the premier publications that focus on diversity, race and business, functioning as a hybrid of organizational catalysts and institutional

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Hastings. (2009). "Chief Diversity Offices Focus on Mission and People." *Society for Human Resources Management*. https://www.shrm.org/about-shrm/news-about-shrm/pages/cdosfocus.aspx.
[94] Sturm, "Organizational Catalysts: Institutional Roles to Sustain Institutional Transformation," 42 - 51
[95] Hastings. 2009.
[96] Sturm, "Introduction." 3 - 9.
[97] Ibid.

intermediaries. Both DiversityInc and Black Enterprise produce and collect information about minority populations and diversity management in the business world, offer spaces for collaboration and community and set standards for accountability and innovation as it relates to corporate diversity. DiversityInc founded in 1998, offers by-subscriptions news and insights around corporate diversity management.[98] DiversityInc does this through its network and relationship with scores of corporate executives that share their data around diversity, diversity management and workplace culture. DiversityInc also regularly hosts webinars with diversity professionals from many of their corporate partners. Since 2001, DiversityInc has produced a competitive Top 50 rankings list of corporate diversity offerings. The ranking analyzes data on various corporate diversity offerings including senior-executive accountability, diversity councils, resource groups and mentoring programs, recruitment and retention of diverse talent, supplier-diversity results and more.[99]

Founded in the 1970s, Black Enterprise is a Black owned media company that focuses specifically on producing business and professional news for Black professionals. Their mission to "educate and empower" Black Professionals into producing business expertise and wealth have set Black Enterprise apart from other publications.[100] With content across digital, print and broadcast platforms Black Enterprise attempts to cover all aspects of Black life and business. Their marquee initiative *Wealth for Life* radiates throughout their content by providing "relevant information for success-minded people at every stage of their financial journey" to maximize career options and opportunities to build generational wealth that has served as a barrier for the Black community.[101] Broadcast content features regular programming updates for Black business

[98] DiversityInc. (2020). About the DiversityInc Top 50 Process. https://www.diversityinc.com/about.
[99] Ibid
[100] Black Enterprise (2020). About Us. https://www.blackenterprise.com/about/.
[101] Ibid.

news, Black business leaders and community trends. *The Black Enterprise Business Report* is a half-hour financial news report. *Our World with Black Enterprise*, a timely, in-depth weekly examination of the issues and trends shaping your lives. *Women of Power TV* provides viewers with intimate, in-depth looks into the lives of some of the world's most accomplished Black women. *Our World* with Black Enterprise is a groundbreaking, half-hour series that airs nationally. *Our World* offers a detailed, perceptive look at social forces and trends shaping modern African American life.[102] Black Enterprise programming offers visibility to stories that are otherwise overlooked and limited in mainstream media programming. In addition to programming, Black Enterprise also hosts an annual event that offers an opportunity for Black professionals across industries and at every level to network.

Sturm's organizational catalyst and institutional intermediaries provide a helpful framework for what lies beyond the current rhetoric around diversity. The business case for diversity has done great work to propel diversity into the forefront of corporate purpose and strategy, but its accomplishments are troubled by the legacy and inefficacy of corporate America's conceptualization of diversity. Organizational catalysts, like diversity specialists and CDOs, and institutional intermediaries like DiversityInc and Black Enterprise, have picked up the mantle left by diversity as legal compliance, bridging the gap between corporate institutions stuck in organizational patterns of maintaining white privilege and underrepresented and disadvantaged communities who seek access to these organizations. As Harris suggests, diversity work cannot be done without dismantling white supremacy and de-privileging whiteness.[103] The business case for diversity, like AA/EEO legislation attempts to call out white privilege, but is thwarted in the translation into the rhetoric of business success. Without first prioritizing the

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[102] Ibid.
[103] Harris, "De-legitimizing the Property Interest in Whiteness Through Affirmative Action." 1777 - 81.

need to unmask whiteness and its expectations of institutional privilege, the business case will do little more than to maintain the status quo. By tempering diversity, which aims to be a radical intervention of institutional privilege, the rhetoric of the business case for diversity fortifies built in biases and exclusion. In order to move beyond this cycle of protecting white institutional privilege, institutional diversity efforts must evolve. I suggest that this evolution must take place outside of the institution. Organizations like DiversityInc and Black Enterprise allow us to imagine a new type of institutional diversity work that lies outside the inertia of white institutions. By employing entrepreneurial energies to institutional diversity work, these transitional organizations offer hope for returning to diversity's early promises of systemic change.

CHAPTER THREE: Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries

In thinking of the opportunities for institutional diversity work outside of white institutions, I turn to entrepreneurship as one avenue that offers a glimmer of hope for returning diversity back to its original aims. The landscape of entrepreneurial study is wide. Sociological theories on entrepreneurship, view entrepreneurship as a response to various factors within a society and their relation to others. Frank Young contends that entrepreneurs work as a part of a group, relating to cultural values developed due to family background and experiences.[104] Young's emphasis on intergroup relations finds that social change is the result of subgroups interacting and reacting to one another.[105] John Kunkel (1986) continues by suggesting that social change involves the transformation of "individuals who are interacting in ways significant for

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[104] Pawar, P. (2013). Social Sciences Perspectives on Entrepreneurship. *Developing Country Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 9: 35 - 38.
[105] Ibid.

politico-economic development."[106] Under this sociological definition, Young and Kunkel set up three conditions that coincide in order to create an entrepreneurial community: low social status, denial of access to important networks, and less institutional resources.[107] As an imagined alternative to the institution, entrepreneurship offers an out, presenting innovation and new ways of organizing, particularly for those who are traditionally excluded from the business world.

Timothy Bates et al (2018) identifies three key dimensions to starting and sustaining a business. Entrepreneurs must have access to education and training to establish business plans, practices and maintain sustained offerings.[108] Business owners must also have access to a substantial pool of capital, either direct or indirectly through bank loans, in order to scale their offerings and take advantage of new opportunities to grow their business.[109] Finally, entrepreneurs must have access to markets, or a consumer base, that creates revenue.[110] Ironically, for Black and other minority entrepreneurs, these key features of creating and sustaining a business also functions as barriers as well as incentives.[111] Historically, Black Americans have suffered exclusion from institutions of higher learning that has in turn inspired the founding of dozens of Black colleges and universities across the country. Restricted access to capital and fiscal wealth creates disadvantages for Black Americans looking to create business ventures. It is also the lack of wealth in Black communities that motivates Black entrepreneurs to create their own businesses to generate new opportunities for Black wealth. Mainstream market access is another barrier to Black entrepreneurship. Yet the discrimination and segregation that makes it difficult for Black consumers is what underpins many Black entrepreneurial ventures.

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[106] Kunkel, John H. "Individuals, Behavior, and Social Change." *The Pacific Sociological Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring, 1966), pp. 48-56.
[107] Pawar, 38.
[108] Bates, T., Williams D. Bradford, Robert Seamans. (2018). Minority Entrepreneurship in Twenty First Century America. *Small Business Economics* (2018) 50: 415 - 427.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

iOne Digital, formerly Urban One, is one of the largest Black owned and operated media companies. The company began as a radio station, purchased by Cathy Hughes, with the strategic imperative to convert its programming format from music content exclusively to one that examined politics and culture from an African American perspective.[112] Now with a portfolio of digital, print, television and radio platforms, iOne Digital serves its mission of amplifying and representing Black culture "boldly, courageously and unapologetically."[113] Hughes is often quoted as wanting to create a seat at the table that counters the damning narratives of Black people by traditional news and media coverage.[114] Building on the aforementioned theories of entrepreneurship, iOneDigital enacts Black entrepreneurship that responds to accomplishments of corporate business case for diversity work.

As I've argued previously, institutional diversity work in its current iteration of the business case for diversity is beholden to the U.S. legacy of race and discrimination, especially in the public sphere. The impact of slavery, segregation and state-sanction racial discrimination clouds socio-economic systems, including the way that business organizations conduct and sustain themselves. As a nation founded on white supremacy, the U.S. has never moved out from its shadow. Affirmative action and equal employment legislation make early attempts at "rethinking rights, power, equality, [and] race" by bringing critical attention to the level of access in U.S.-American institutions.[115] Sadly affirmative action's attempts to dismantle white supremacy and de-privilege whiteness are choked by subsequent court responses that allow whiteness to maintain control over the speed of social change.[116] Through institutional diversity's

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[112] iOne Digital (2020). WE ARE URBAN ONE. https://urban1.com/company/.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Mitchell, G. (2018). Urban One's Cathy Hughes on the Importance of 'Creating Your Own Table'. *Billboard*. https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/8463528.
[115] Harris, "Delegitimizing The Property Interest in Whiteness Through Affirmative Action." 1777 - 81.
[116] Harris, "Brown I." 1750 - 54.

transformation from affirmative actions and equal employment opportunity compliance to the business case for diversity, whiteness continues to maintain control over the pace of institutional change as evidenced through the slow growth of diverse representation across companies and industries as well as the countless anecdotes of racial discrimination and micro-aggressions despite continued corporate commitments to diversity. In the failure to address the relationship of whiteness and Blackness to business and social conduct, attempts to instill value in diversity cannot go far enough in enacting institutional changes. If allowed to take on its original aims, institutional diversity efforts would dismantle institutional practices and thinking that give shelter to white heteronormativity at the expense of excluding and harm all other identities.

This thesis theorizes a new form of entrepreneurship that responds to the mantle of left by historical forms of institutional diversity. I propose that the latest transformation of diversity work takes place through a particular form of Black entrepreneurship that builds on the momentum of the business case of diversity while responding to the institutional barriers that persist for many Black and other POC stakeholders. I propose new terminology for thinking about how Black entrepreneurs that are responding to the shortcomings of institutional diversity work. These new Black entrepreneurs, what I call Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries (BEIs), function not only as Black entrepreneurs but also as organizational catalysts and institutional intermediaries. As catalysts, Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries employ information and knowledge to build community and create accountability around diversity, equity and inclusion. As intermediaries, BEIs are able to leverage their expertise and credibility within their respective industries to foster change and provide accountability. BEIs serve as external partners for more traditional organizations to build a common language, reporting measures and metrics around institutional diversity and inclusion practices. Unlike traditional entrepreneurs, BEIs are largely

reliant on corporate partnerships and sponsorships. Increasingly, traditional organizations look to BEIs to gain access to Black talent and communities as well as authority on salient Black issues. BEIs offer a new way of doing institutional diversity work by removing diversity from the context of traditional institutions. Ahmed provides that "the feeling of doing diversity is the feeling of coming up against something that does not move...the institution becomes that which you come against."[117] Where corporate diversity is constrained and limited by institutional resistance to the change that diversity demands, BEIs offer a way around the stasis of the institution. As external partners, BEIs circumvent stasis that allow them to amplify a mission around diversity, particularly as it relates to Black stakeholders. Through research and reporting, programming and partnership BEIs become vital partners in establishing successful corporate diversity efforts and represent the newest evolution of institutional diversity work.

METHODOLOGY

In order to understand how Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries (BEIs) represent the latest iterations of institutional diversity work, this study focuses on a narrow subset of organizations in the media and communications industry that serve as examples for BEIs. Earlier iterations of BEIs are seen in organizations like DiversityInc and Black Enterprise, both of which articulate a clear directive for information, community building and accountability around diversity. Organizations like Jopwell and ADCOLOR pick up the mantle left by DiversityInc and Black Enterprise, offering a new way of doing institutional diversity work. Jopwell and ADCOLOR are organizations that focus on diversity, equity and inclusion with the media and communications industry. They function as BEIs to facilitate and develop diversity knowledge,

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[117] Ahmed, "Institutional Life." 19 - 50.

to build coalitions and constituencies for action and influence around diversity, equity and inclusion and serve as accountability partners to hold traditional organizations to their state diversity commitment.

This thesis uses textual analysis of interview footage from the founders of Jopwell and ADCOLOR to explore the ways that Jopwell and ADCOLOR function as BEIs. In the interviews selected for this analysis, the founders discuss the purpose and function of their organization and what they have to offer when it comes to institutional diversity. I analyzed 8 publically available, one-to-one interviews with Jopwell founders Porter Braswell and Ryan Williams and ADCOLOR founder Tiffany Warren, 3 video advertisements for Jopwell and ADCOLOR, and a roundtable discussion that features ADCOLOR's Tiffany Warren. The subject matter for each of the videos cover the founding of each organization, the personal background of the founders, and the offerings of each organization.

Jopwell is a tech startup that partners with companies to improve their recruitment of underrepresented ethnic minority candidates. Launched in 2015 by Porter Braswell and Ryan Williams, Jopwell provides a digital platform for corporate recruiters to connect with Black, Latinx, and Native American professionals and students. Braswell and Williams take direct aim at the "pipeline problem" that is often cited as an obstacle for increasing diverse representation in corporate America.[118] Jopwell offers paid annual memberships to their corporate partners which allows them to access thousands of diverse applicants, who are able to accept job listings and resources on the other side of the platform for free. Braswell explains that Jopwell's offering diversifies corporate applicant pools, increases exposure for Black, Latinx and Indigenous

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[118] Culter, K. (2015). YC-Backed Jopwell Is Building The Apparently Missing "Pipeline" of Diverse Candidates For Tech Jobs. *TechCrunch*. https://techcrunch.com/2015/07/15/jopwell.

candidates, as well as creating a system of accountability to help change corporate culture.[119] ADCOLOR is a non-profit organization that champions diversity and inclusion in advertising, marketing and media. Beginning in 2005 as an annual awards ceremony, ADCOLOR has become the largest, most recognized cross-discipline diversity and inclusion initiative for creative industries.[120] In addition to their annual conference, ADCOLOR also offers professional development for junior professionals of color as well as training and workshops to interrogate and improve corporate culture. ADCOLOR's Founder and President Tiffany Warren shares that the goal of the organization is to "create a community of diverse professionals who are here to support and celebrate one another."[121] Like Jopwell, ADCOLOR depends on corporate sponsorships to provide and develop their offering. These organizations represent a budding subset of organizations that are responding to the call of institutional diversity work as entrepreneurial intermediaries. They serve as an information resource for and about historically underrepresented groups, they provide a space for creating community around diversity, equity and inclusion, and they create systems for accountability for traditional or white institutions.

ANALYSIS

This thesis has articulated why corporate diversity is stifled in creating systemic change for underrepresented groups. The shortcomings of institutional diversity work are due in part to the ambiguity with which they address the 'why' for diversity. In other words, corporate diversity does little to address white institutional privilege, opting instead to offer cosmetic solutions to fix structural and societal circumstances that deem different as less. I propose that

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[119] Cross, S and Porter Braswell. (2019). A Data-Driven Approach to Hiring More Diverse Talent." *Harvard Business Review.* https://hbr.org/2019/12/why-isnt-your-organization-isnt-hiring-diverse-talent.
[120] ADCOLOR (2020). Partnership Guide.
[121] ADCOLOR (2020). Our Mission. http://adcolor.org/about/our-mission/.

Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries

Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries carry forward institutional diversity work by offering a "for us, by us" approach to institutional diversity work. Using Jopwell and ADCOLOR as case studies, I explore the ways in which BEIs differ from diversity as offered by white institutions. By analyzing interviews from Jopwell founders Porter Braswell and Ryan Williams as well as ADCOLOR founder and President Tiffany Warren, this textual analysis explores 3 themes throughout each interview. The first covers the founding of each organization, including the background experiences of the founders preceding the launch of their companies. The second theme focuses on how Braswell, Williams and Warren discuss and define diversity for their organizations. Building on their definition of diversity, I examine how each company discusses the challenges to institutional diversity work, including how their respective organizations address these challenges.

CEO & Founders

As the CEO, Porter Braswell's personal narrative offers the core origins of Jopwell's mission and offerings. In a 2018 interview, Braswell explains that his path to founding Jopwell was ultimately the result of "early access" afforded by upper-middle class privilege.[122] Raised in the Bronx, Braswell explains that his parents provided a narrow path for his career: putting forth lawyer, doctor and finance as the only potential options. Attending a prestigious Northeast college preparatory school, Braswell shared he gained his first summer internship experience at 15 at Morgan Stanley.[123] After high school, Braswell went on to attend Yale University as a Political Science major where he was able to intern at Goldman Sachs, leading to his first full-time job as an analyst on Wall Street. He explains further that he recognized that though he

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[122] Y-Combinator. (2018). Funding Is an Outcome of Building a Good Business - Porter Braswell of Jopwell [Interview]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZgTD3pggp.
[123] Ibid.

had been fortunate to "find his way to his seat" (referring to his role at Sachs), many other Black men are not fortunate to experience the same.[124] At Sachs, Braswell would meet his co-founder Ryan Williams. Williams explains that the pair were asked to assist with the company's diversity efforts on the trading floor.[125] Through this project they were able to "gain access to the pain points" of the organization when it came to diversifying their talent pools.[126] Braswell calls upon the release of the 2014 diversity reports from major tech firms like Google, Yahoo! and Facebook that painted a stark picture of the decelerated progress of diversity efforts in the industry.[127] Braswell explains that he believed that it was his responsibility to leverage his privilege and experience to help create impact for people like him.[128] In the fall of 2014, Braswell and Williams decided to offer a solution to the technology industry's "pipeline problem" by providing a tool to find qualified candidates of color to fulfill technical roles.[129] Braswell and Williams leveraged their personal network to gain intended customers and to raise $500,000 within the span of 1 month without having a functional product.[130] Using the seed funds, Braswell and Williams hired an engineer, which Braswell met at an alumni event to celebrate the first Black student at his high school, to build a demo, which would allow them to apply to the startup accelerator Y-Combinator (made famous by the likes of Airbnb, Door Dash and Drobox). Propelled by investors like Magic Johnson, Jopwell would secure partnerships with companies like Facebook, Etsy and MasterCard to build a niche offering that equally offers access for

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[124] Ibid.
[125] Forbes (2017). Jopwell Bets Tech Can Bring Diversity to Work [Interview]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHeJa_GapDy.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Eaduccucci, L. (2014). "Silicon Valley Has A Huge Diversity Problem And These Charts Prove It." *Business Insider*. https://www.businessinsider.com/diversity-in-tech.
[128] Y-Combinator. (2018).
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

Black, Latinx and Indigenous candidates and professionals to corporate careers and corporate recruiters to diverse candidates.

Tiffany R. Warren, CEO and founder of ADCOLOR, paints a similar runway to her position at ADCOLOR. Born and raised in Boston, Warren shares that she was privately educated, attending Winsor, a private 7-year college preparatory school. Following Winsor, Warren attended Bentley University, the alma mater of Robert Kennedy, Jay Leno and a number of Boston's political leaders. Warren explains that she was "set up for success" through the INROADS program, allowing her to take on a multi-year paid internship at Verizon and giving Warren her first foray into the media industry. After becoming interested in marketing in college through a relationship with Elizabeth Talerman, then an executive at Ingalls, Quinn and Johnson, Warren explains that though her professional trajectory propelled her through the ranks of account management. In 1997, she was awarded as one of the top 25 people of color in advertising and flew to Chicago to be honored with other advertising and marketing professionals, few of whom were people of color.[131] She recalls feeling as if she and other professionals of color were "on an island where you're expected to be excellent, you're expected to be this beacon of shining light but you can't have thoughts and you don't feel like you can fail."[132] Aligning to what she believes is her true calling to "building communities and becoming a voice to the voiceless," Warren was offered the opportunity to become the head of diversity at the American Association for Advertising Agencies, beginning her 20 year career in diversity, equity and inclusion.[133] In 2005, Warren founded ADCOLOR with the original intent of honoring people of color in advertising, marketing and media through an award show program. In most

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[131] Jones, N. R. (2018). 13: Interview with Tiffany R. Warren [Interview]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjtQb6PuYjA.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

interviews, Warren is introduced as the Senior Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion at Omnicom Group as well as the CEO and founder of ADCOLOR. She explains in the 2018 *Fierce Files* interview that in negotiating her position at Omnicom that she wanted autonomy to not only oversee diversity, equity and inclusion efforts at Omnicom but also to have the freedom to continue her work with ADCOLOR.[134] Over the last 15 years, ADCOLOR has grown to provide professional networking, recognition and training around diversity and inclusion within the creative media industries.[135]

The "Community"

Braswell, Williams and Warren each discuss the "community" as part of their organization's target audience and offering. For Braswell and Williams, this community makes up their two-fold offering. In a 2016 interview, Williams shares that the pipeline problem that Jopwell aims to address is due to the fact the predominantly white organizations don't have "access to the community."[136] Braswell and Williams are both explicit that Jopwell's community is for Black, Latinx, and Native American professionals who either don't have access to or aren't aware of career opportunities in corporate America. Braswell explains that Jopwell's focus on the inclusion and hiring of Black, Latinx and Native American is due to the fact that they are the most underrepresented in corporate positions.[137] The 2015 *Let Them See Us* Jopwell advertisement begins with statistics that only 18% of professional and management positions are held by Blacks and Latinos.[138] The ad features a range of people sharing their experiences with

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[134] Ibid.
[135] CES (2020). ADCOLOR®'s Tiffany R. Warren in the C Space Studio [Interview]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muQhkchyYmQ.
[136] Forbes (2017).
[137] TechCrunch. (2016). Jopwell's Porter Braswell on Hiring Diversity [Interview]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmUyQJsdesY.
[138] Team Jopwell. (2015). *Let Them See Us* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQxkH45.

underrepresentation and racial bias in the workplace. The ad closes as the speakers share their names and titles, concluding with the mantra "let them see us," as a call to companies that claim that qualified candidates of color do not exist.[139] In a 2018 interview, Braswell explains that most people who are applying for jobs apply to companies based on some personal or professional connection; Black, Latinx and Indigenous candidates, who already suffer from underrepresentation in most professional industries do not have as many connections to rely upon during their job hunt.[140] When asked why candidates might look to Jopwell as a resource, Braswell explains that the company provides "the referral, at scale, for our community," providing a foot in the door for organizations who are looking to hire candidates from underrepresented backgrounds.[141] Companies then in turn pay Jopwell to gain access to the community of Black, Latinx and Native American candidates to help diversify their candidate pool.[142] Braswell and Williams' conceptualization of the community as Black, Latinx and Indigenous helps to paint a picture of how they conceptualize diversity. Using workforce statistics around representation of these three racial and cultural groups help to differentiate Jopwell from other organizations that aim to address the minority employment gap in corporate America.

Tiffany Warren offers a broader notion of diversity and community for ADCOLOR. In a red carpet interview at the 2014 ADCOLOR Awards Ceremony, Warren provides that ADCOLOR offers a platform to celebrate the people in advertising, marketing and media who have done work to push comfortable conversations about race and change the perceptions of

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[139] Ibid.
[140] Y-Combinator. (2018).
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

people of color.[143] In speaking about who ADCOLOR services, Warren uses "we" to refer to her trajectory as a person of color in the advertising industry. She describes her calling as, "always in building community and being a voice to the voiceless," citing a personal anecdote about being celebrated as one of few people of color early in her career. Warren relies heavily on the term "people of color" to discuss not only her career trajectory but also the target audience for ADCOLOR. In a 2020 interview at the Consumer Electronics Show, Warren provides that while ADCOLOR began as an award show to honor people of color in advertising, marketing and media, the offerings has expanded to include a mission to keep diversity and inclusion at the center of the conversation. Warren describes herself in a 2019 interview as a hope and heart director, helping people of color and other underrepresented groups to feel a part of the creative industries, to offer opportunities for mentoring and guidance that weren't available to her during the start of her career, and professional development. In a 2017 advertisement for ADCOLOR, Warren along with other speakers explain that diversity cannot just include 1 type of person but includes a range of intersectional identities under race, gender identity and more.[144] In a 2020 sparks and honey roundtable discussion about diversity and innovation, Warren explains that diversity is multifaceted and that it must include visible and "invisible" forms of difference.[145] Taken together with Warren's state calling to give voice and celebrate, "people of color and those who feel underrepresented," leaving space for interpretation about ADCOLOR's specific audience.[146]

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[143] Red Carpet Report (2014). Tiffany R. Warren, founder of ADCOLOR at the 8th Annual ADCOLOR Awards #justadcolor [Interview]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFuiqKlf33o.
[144] ADCOLOR (2017). #ComeTogether for ADCOLOR [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-X_CiMSODs
[145] Sparks & Honey (2020). sparks & honey Briefing | 02.19.2020: Diversity & Innovation [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YkR2UgInD4.
[146] CES (2020).

Let Them See Us

Braswell and Williams focus on the pipeline problem as a major obstacle for the community that Jopwell services. Braswell explains that Jopwell began with the intention of providing a technical solution for addressing the technology industry's problem with diversity.[147] Braswell explains that though he has no formal technical training, he knew that diversity recruiting was a problem for the industry.[148] Braswell describes Jopwell as a product of the community, for the community that has been embraced equally by the community.[149] After launching the platform in January 2015, thousands of users signed on organically as Jopwell. Braswell attributes this early success to Jopwell's explicit mission to create connections for Black, Latinx and Indigenous communities.[150] He suggests that the main obstacle for most companies lies in their unwillingness to directly state what aspects of diversity that they are struggling with. Braswell explains that organizations need partners like Jopwell to address their challenges to fix their candidate pipelines and create authentic connections. In describing how Jopwell choses or vets its corporate partners he explains that Jopwell does not educate about the importance, but rather partner with organizations that understand the business case for diversity. Jopwell founders market their success creating connections. Braswell and Williams explain that Jopwell's offering is two-fold: on the one hand Jopwell provides exposure and referrals at scale for Black, Latinx and Native American professionals and students. Braswell describes the organization's sweet spot as early tenure to mid-level professionals of color.[151] As users sign on the platform they are able to view job postings from organizations on the other side of the platform that pay to access a diverse talent pool. In a 2017 interview with TechCrunch reporter

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[147] Y-Combinator. (2018).
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

Megan Rose Dickey, Braswell explains that though the company does not disclose specific numbers when it comes to hiring, Jopwell aggregates their success as connections, including interviews, recruiter outreach, and hires. Williams in a 2016 interview provides that anonymity of specific hiring numbers is tied to company relationships and Jopwell's desire to protect corporate partnerships.[152]

Warren troubles several things when it comes to why corporate diversity has struggled to date. In a 2020 interview at the Consumer Electronics Show, Warren explains that organizations have not been able to get beyond one type of diversity offering.[153] She suggests that pouring resources into employee affinity groups and programming from underrepresented groups does little to address underlying systemic issues that lead to people of color.[154] Though ADCOLOR began as an award show, Warren explains, it has grown into an annual conference of over 1200, in addition to offering professional development and training for people of color as well as their allies and peers. Warren also pushes against the business case for diversity suggesting that it depends too strongly on organizations doing the right things for financial gain.[155] During the sparks and honey roundtable discussion, Warren questions whether tying diversity to compensation and bottom-line creating a problematic psychic effect for those on the other end. Warren poignantly asks whether organizations are compensated for sameness. She poses this question in several other interviews when asked about the value of diversity, she wisely asks about the value of sameness.[156] Warren marks the success of ADCOLOR in its ability to create

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[152] Forbes (2017).
[153] CES (2020).
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Advertising Club of New York. (2019). Icons, Rock Stars, and Innovators Conversations Vol.3 : Tiffany R. Warren [Interview]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXK5cCET9hY.

space for people of color in creative industries to celebrate themselves in an industry where they

are underrepresented and silenced.[157]

CHAPTER FOUR: BEIs as Cultural Brokers

BEIs provide three essential roles as information entrepreneurs, coalition builders and

accountability partners. As the name suggests, they offer an intermediary partner whose primary

focus is diversity, equity and inclusion within white institutions. Jopwell and ADCOLOR both

fulfill their roles at BEIs.

Jopwell and ADCOLOR as Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries

	Informational Entrepreneur	Coalition Builder	Accountability Partner
Jopwell	*The Well*: online resources that provides data on Black, Latinx and Indigenous professionals; interview, resume, cover letter insights; training and professional development	*Jopwell Talks*: networking conference for Black, Latinx and Indigenous professionals and candidates; corporate sponsored events	Dependent on corporate sponsorship; funding; Provides solution to minority employment gap; removing the excuse used by corporation to account for low minority hiring Removes ambiguity from what diversity can mean (diversity = Black, Latinx & Indigenous)
ADCOLOR	Data around people of color in advertising, marketing and media industry. ADCOLOR INSIDE networking & professional development training in partnership with corporate sponsor	ADCOLOR Awards & Conference: meeting of creatives and professionals of color in marketing, advertising and media industry; honorees enter a specific community /network.	Dependent on corporate sponsorship; partnership with ADCOLOR becomes a marker of success in diversity ADCOLOR INSIDE mini-summits or workshops on how to address diversity at a specific organization

As information entrepreneurs BEIs are able to catalyze action through information. The

Information can be leveraged to influence decision makers and support the so-called business

case for diversity that is still so prevalent in corporate thinking. Knowledge also assists BEIs

with building coalitions and creating networking opportunities for those who share common

interests in seeing institutions become more diverse and inclusive. Both Jopwell and ADCOLOR

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[157] CES (2020).

market access to community not only for those who would benefit from institutional diversity efforts, but also corporations who are looking to leverage diversity for business success. In predominantly white institutions affinity groups and HR or diversity professionals are responsible for driving diversity and having the "hard conversations" about workplace bias and inclusion. BEIs broaden these communities by bringing other stakeholders to the table. Through funding models that require corporate buy-in, BEIs offer ways for companies to tangibly demonstrate their commitment to diversity by partnering with organizations whose imperatives are focused on achieving radical change. Jopwell and ADCOLOR provide a 'for us, by us' way of doing diversity, undoing the white-centric efforts that persists in the business case for diversity. These organizations allow institutions to direct their funding at initiatives that seek to address underlying structural issues rather than attempting to manage the aesthetics of diversity. BEIs role in creating "multiple constituencies for change" at varying levels, allow them to use their social capital and credibility to make the process of institutional change easier.[158]

Using the Language of Community

Jopwell and ADCOLOR represent a very subtle evolution from institutional diversity as offered by white institutions. As both organizations fulfill the key characteristics of BEIs, the interviews with the founders Braswell, Williams and Warren articulate their role as cultural brokers between white corporations and historically underrepresented communities, carrying the ambiguous logic that has troubled previous iterations of institutional diversity work. Braswell explains Jopwell as the champion, the sponsor, or "the referral at scale for the community."[159] He provides recruiting in industries like technology that are based on referral, white founders hire

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[158] Sturm, "Organizational Catalysts: Institutional Roles to Sustain Institutional Transformation." 42 - 54.
[159] Y-Combinator (2018)

friends and associates within their network that are usually also white. This pattern of growth continues for organizations like Facebook and Google, until the resulting organization that is overrepresented by white, male employees. Williams describes this process as common, not just for tech but for most organizations.[160] Jopwell offers an intentional intervention to traditional recruiting processes. At scale, Jopwell does the work of recruiting specific candidates, the most underrepresented, outside of the network of largely white institutions. Uniquely, Jopwell does not disclose specific data when it comes to their interventions in the hiring pipeline. The company's success is aggregated into the language of connections which includes applications, communications between candidates and recruiters, interviews, as well as hires. When asked why, Williams provides that hiding their numbers protects relationships with corporations that have always resisted transparency and accountability when it comes to diversity. This aggregation of outcomes around Jopwell's success obfuscates their intervention as a BEI but also ensures that white institutions are allowed to control the flow of information around diversity hires. The lack of transparency repeals accountability if there partners allows information around actual hiring outcomes to be hidden. In effect Jopwell's intervention becomes more about including Black, Latinx and Native Americans in the process of recruiting rather than changing their representation and inclusion as hired employees at white institutions.

ADCOLOR's intervention involves maintaining a cadence for the celebration of and advocacy for people of color within advertising, marketing and media. As she describes ADCOLOR's offering to create space and opportunity for people of color, Warren recycles the same ambiguity that oversimplifies and conflates the historical context of racial power dynamics at play.[161] While elsewhere, Warren seems to understand the complexity of race and power. In

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[160] Forbes (2017).

[161] Sexton, J. (2010). "People-of-Color-Blindness." *Social Text* 28, no. 2 (2010): 31–56. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2009-066.

discussing the story of Jalaiah Harmon, the Tik Tok star who was credited with the creation of a viral dance video earlier this year. Warren explains that her success with being credited, where many other Black creators are not, is due to having representation and voices in spaces like Black Twitter. Warren adds that having Black stakeholders at the *New York Times* and All Star Weekend also helped to get the teen her rightful credit.[162] Warren questions however, how Harmon will be celebrated as her internet success subsides and whether her education and future success are being considered today.[163] This thoughtfulness for Blackness and cultural appropriation, and the sustained need for intervention for Harmon contrasts in the language that she uses to discuss the community served by ADCOLOR. Warren frequently uses phrasing around people of color and other marginalized groups, without clarifying what that means. While the inclusion of a range of identities does not directly diminish ADCOLOR's intervention, I worry that the ambiguity of language through terms like people of color, lean towards a dangerous conflation of experiences that belong more appropriately to Black people rather than all people of color. 'People of color' is a softer umbrella term that promotes white comfortability that is incompatible with the systemic change that the history of diversity demands.

Creating Credibility

Jopwell and ADCOLOR function as middle-men, vending access to community not only for corporate organizations seeking to demonstrate their commitment to diversity but also for members of underrepresented communities. Their position as diversity brokers requires a level of credibility and authenticity that is built on the founders' early access to private, corporate networks that echo the socio-economic access of their white peers. Braswell and Warren both

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[162] Sparks & honey (2020).
[163] Ibid.

discuss opportunities afforded to them as teenagers that allowed them to develop a network that was later leveraged in their career. Each benefitted from private schooling at elite college preparatory schools. Braswell reports that his first internship experience at 15 was with Morgan Stanley, giving him an early privilege that he recognized could be leveraged for starting his own company. Similarly, Warren shares her experience of being linked into the InRoads program, an initiative aimed at offering internship opportunities at top companies. She explains that through this experience, she was able to establish her foothold in the advertising industry and benefited from a network of peers in similar industries. Braswell, Williams and Warren also attended prestigious colleges, Yale and Bentley University, maintaining access to private, corporate networks that would later be leveraged in their career. Unlike most minority entrepreneurs, Braswell, Williams and Warren benefit from a private, corporate network that positioned them to start their own business ventures. Braswell's recounting of raising a half a million dollars and a handful of clients within 1 month of deciding to start his own company, is a tellingly uncommon narrative for the road to business ownership. Braswell also mirrors the growth of his company to other tech start-up whose hiring rely on personal and alumni networks.[164] Warren explains that her first mentor relationship was developed as a result of a seminar taught by her then mentor, Elizabeth Talerman. Talerman would eventually offer Warren sponsorship to her then role as Manager of Diversity Programs at the American Association of Advertising Agencies at 25 years old. Warren continues that this foray into corporate diversity work early in her career gave her the opportunity and experiences that are attributed to her success today. Warren, who began ADCOLOR in 2005, was already well established as a leader in the advertising, marketing and media industry when the company was launched. Even as she is the founder of ADCOLOR, this role is paired with her more prominent role as the Senior Vice President of Omnicom, one the

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[164] Y-Combinator (2018).

world's top marketing and advertising companies. The level of corporate access afforded early on by Braswell, Williams and Warren differentiates Jopwell and ADCOLOR from traditional minority business, giving them an additional privilege that undoubtedly adds to their success as BEIs.

While Jopwell and ADCOLOR's dependence on corporate sponsorship creates a level of accountability and responsibility for corporate partners, it also complicates their autonomy and authenticity when it comes to institutional diversity work. Jopwell's reliance on connections as a metric for the success muddies what they actually accomplish as a BEI. Though Jopwell's offering provides a distinction in solving the pipeline problem for of Black, Latinx and Indigenous professionals, the obscurity of the language of connections, which includes completed applications, any outreach from recruiters (including automated messages), interviews as well as hires, diminishes what they accomplish. Even as Jopwell directly names Black, Latinx and Indigenous inclusion as a tenant of diversity, the lack of transparency with how they accomplish inclusion protects corporate institutions who ultimately do little to change their hiring and recruiting practices. Jopwell's lack of transparency with hiring versus connections makes it impossible to know what's changed. ADCOLOR on the other hand flatly rejects the language of the business case for diversity, calling out its ability to commodify difference. Warren's constant questioning of sameness also builds into ADCOLOR's celebration and championing of people of color within advertising, marketing and media industries. Yet the organizations desire to advocate for systematic change both in front of and behind the scene,[165] is

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[165] Red Carpet Report (2014).

only thwarted by, what Jared Sexton calls, people of color blindness that "insists upon the monolithic character of victimization under white supremacy."[166]

CONCLUSION: Imagining a New Celebration

Jopwell and ADCOLOR represent a critical step towards achieving the radical intentions of institutional diversity efforts to decenter and de-privilege whiteness. Both organizations build and cultivate specific communities that are able to advocate and accelerate diversity and inclusion within white institutions. As BEIs, Jopwell and ADCOLOR serve the critical role in taking institutional diversity work outside of the limits of the institution. Where institutional diversity work is choked by an institutional inertia that encourages sameness and stasis, BEIs like Jopwell and ADCOLOR have a greater freedom to demand change around diversity, equity and inclusion. The power of BEIs lies in their credibility and ability to mobilize constituencies that demand structural changes. They advocate not only for representation of diverse persons but also for institutional change that restructures resources and privilege.

The key to success as a BEI lies in the organization's ability to build credibility across two communities. Jopwell and ADCOLOR founders benefit from early, childhood access to private corporate networks through private schooling, representing a subscription to a traditional path towards corporate success. Braswell, Williams and Warren provide throughout their interviews that access to private, corporate communities were critical in helping them to develop their organizations. Each of the founders express a responsibility to use their corporate networks to create opportunities for others without that privilege. Both Jopwell and ADCOLOR's offerings are negotiated through their relationship with white corporate institutions to offer

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[166] Sexton, 48.

access to minority communities. Jopwell and ADCOLOR establish roles as cultural brokers to manage the connection between two communities that have been historically linked through oppression and violence. Jopwell and ADCOLOR also benefit from their access to communities that historically represent diversity in white spaces. Braswell, Williams and Warren are all Black, offering them a form of credibility and authenticity that is difficult to challenge.[167] Through their access not only to corporate communities but also communities of underrepresented and historically disenfranchised groups, Jopwell and ADCOLOR are able to function profitably as BEIs. They translate the good intentions of their corporate partners into actionable and tangible change for those the targets of institutional diversity work. The ambiguity of Jopwell's connections represent an explicit nod to protecting the diversity data of white organizations. While Jopwell works to increase diversity in the hiring process, they do not publicize actual hiring numbers, leaving corporations to maintain their lack of transparency around systemic change. ADCOLOR's use of "people of color and other underrepresented groups" creates a catch-all phrasing that conflates the complexity of experiences and often co-opts the Black experience as the experience of all non-white people.

Though troubling, due to the resemblance of this role to overseers, Jopwell and ADCOLOR function as middlemen that help to move institutional diversity back towards its historical intent to radically dismantle white privilege. Just as previous iterations of diversity as compliance and the business case for diversity have benefitted from ambiguity and deference to whiteness, Jopwell and ADCOLOR incorporate a similar nod towards whiteness while attempting to elevate diversity, equity and inclusion to the level of systemic change. In recognizing the precariousness of their position between whiteness and the communities

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[167] See Appendix, 3.1 – 4.1.

represented by Jopwell and ADCOLOR, I caution against the conflation of the term community and give pause to consider to which community these organizations belong. Their credibility as BEIs functions through their ability to act as cultural brokers with access to white, private and corporate networks as well as the communities that they seek to leverage for the sake of institutional diversity. I'm equally cautious of the ambiguity of the language around diversity that mirrors the ambiguity within previous iterations of institutional diversity work that end lead back to a protection of white institutional privilege.

Imagining a New Celebration

I attended another Black History Month celebration a few days before the Black History themed happy hour at Weber Shandwick. Hosted by an affinity resource group at Wieden + Kennedy (W + K), the event was the culmination of weekly events throughout the month of February. The culminating event featured a Black business Market and happy hour, open to the public. The event sprawled across the lobby of the Lower Manhattan office with Black vendors and creatives filled the space, showcasing everything from decorative buttons to skin and hair care. T-shirts dawn phrases like "Black without apology."[168] An art exhibit, curated by the owners of Brooklyn's Black Vintage Market featured historic magazine advertisements, collectibles and personal relics all centering on Black history. The Black affinity group that organized the celebration is peppered with former ADCOLOR honorees and the W + K's work is also often recognized at the annual ADCOLOR awards not only for inclusion of Black professionals but also for including narratives in advertising and marketing. As compared to the Black History themed corporate happy hour, the Black is Business Market offers a different type

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[168] Wieden + Kennedy (2020). We Are: A Look at Black History Month Through The Programming of W+K Noir. https://www.wk.com/culture/we-are-a-look-at-black-history-month-through-the-programming-of-w-k-noir/. See Appendix 5.1 – 5.2.

of celebration from the one I shared at the beginning of this work. The Black History Market is a form of celebration that is explicit and credible in the way that it celebrates Blackness as it allows Black culture to permeate unapologetically, even if only for the few hours.

In thinking about the ways in which Jopwell and ADCOLOR represent a change from the current business case for diversity, I recognize the opportunity that organizations like Jopwell and ADCOLOR have to embolden diversity efforts. Although these two organizations carry forward some of the more problematic aspects of institutional diversity work, it is clear that the field of diversity is moving away from its historic locus within white institutions. What is unclear is whether these outside offerings will continue to uphold white institutional privilege and to protect white comfort. More research is needed to standardize the role that BEIs fulfill as cultural brokers and what effects these organizations have on effecting radical institutional change in corporate America.

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APPENDIX

Black History Themed Happy Hour
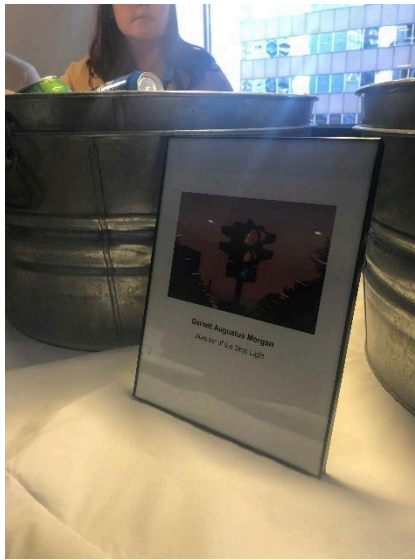
Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2

Figure 1.3

Figure 1.4

Trustpilot Reviews (Now Deleted)

Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2

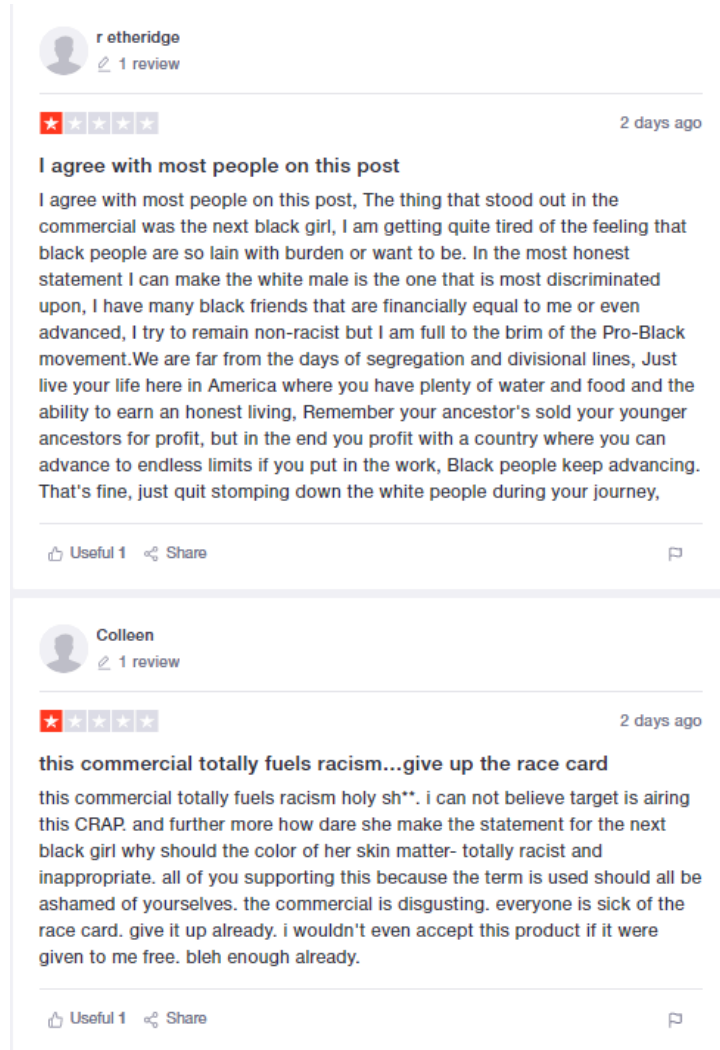*Jopwell Founders*

Figure 3.1:   Porter Braswell,
                CEO & Co-Founder

Figure 3.2:   Ryan Williams,
                President & Co-Founder

ADCOLOR Founder

Figure 4.1:   Tiffany Warren
               President & Founder

Wieden + Kennedy Black History Market

Figure 5.1

Black Entrepreneurial Intermediaries

Figure 5.2