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URBAN AGENDA: From Video Game Consumers to Video Game Producers

by [David R. Jones, Esq.](#) January 4, 2024

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David R. Jones Credit: Contributed

We all know that video games play an important role in the lives of young people, particularly young people of color. But what if we could harness that interest in game playing to develop personal and professional skills such as critical thinking, communication, complex problem solving and teamwork skills?

To take it one step further, what if we could leverage the popularity of video game playing to inform more students of color about the growing educational and career opportunities in the digital games industry? And in doing so, put more of them on a “pathway” into the lucrative and diversifying high tech workplace.

For those of us who are not video game enthusiasts (count me among them), the video gaming industry is big business. In 2023, the [Worldwide Video Games](#) market is projected to reach a revenue of \$249.6 billion and grow to \$389.7 billion by 2028. The [United States Video Games](#) market is projected to reach a revenue of \$68.27 billion by 2023 and grow to \$111.50 billion by 2028. In 2023 it is estimated that 268,698 people were [employed](#) in the US Video Games market.

Not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of these jobs, which pay very well, are dominated by white males. This despite research indicating that Blacks and Latinos are the industry's most enthusiastic consumers.

Indeed, a 2015 [study](#) by the Pew Research Center showed that 83 percent of non-Hispanic Black teenagers play video games, compared to 71 percent of white teenagers, with 69 percent of Latino teens not too far behind. By 2023 the numbers had shifted. [Bloomberg News](#) reported in July 2023 that Latino (79 percent) and Black Americans (77 percent), followed by Asian/Pacific Islanders (67 percent) play video games more than White Americans (62 percent), according to an annual industry report.

With the continued growth of the global video gaming industry and the major role people of color play as consumers, one might expect game characters and storylines reflecting the diverse cultures of people of color would be more prevalent. However, that has not been the case. Instead, the prevailing narratives found in video games by and large reflect the experiences and sensibilities of the sector's white male leadership. As such, people of color have been portrayed in negative stereotypical roles. Only recently have some of the major video game companies begun portraying people of color characters and their stories more accurately. This trend has created a growing interest on the part of industry leaders to hire people of color, and thereby capitalize on a lost business opportunity to expand their consumer base.

To find that pipeline of talent, and diversify the industry, NYC-based video game companies should look at the youth in New York City.

In 2021 the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment (MOME) released a [report](#) calling for the city to diversify and grow the size of the digital gaming industry, which in 2020 supported 7,600 jobs, \$762 million in wages, and \$2 billion in economic output. Mayor Adams has repeatedly stated he wants to see more students of color becoming producers of digital games and not simply consumers. To that end, he launched the "Gaming Pathways Program" in 2022 with an investment of \$2 million to create a pathway from high school to the City College of New York (CCNY) – CUNY's premier science and technology campus — and then into careers in the digital gaming industry.

Gaming Pathways is a partnership involving CCNY, which is creating a new bachelor's degree program in digital game development; [Urban Arts](#), a nonprofit that has been operating programs in Title I high schools that use game design to promote STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics); and the [Harlem Gallery of Science \(HGS\)](#), whose initial study played an important role in creating the Gaming Pathways Program.

HGS uses culturally sensitive experiential learning programs, teambuilding exercises, and interactive exhibitions to attract and prepare its target group — underrepresented youth (ages 11-24) — for undergraduate education and careers in STEAM fields. HGS' latest exhibition is called, "*Video Games: The Great Connector*," and opens on Feb. 3, 2024 at the Harlem School of Arts. Admission is free and individuals and groups interested in attending can get FREE tickets by going to [HarlemVideoGamePopup.org](#).

The exhibition, which is geared to middle and high school students, may be a real revelation for caregivers and parents who often think of video games as a waste of time. They will discover that playing video games can lead to high paying jobs in the digital games industry and related creative fields. Visitors to the exhibit will have an opportunity to play games and uncover the invisible design influencing their gaming experience. Most importantly, students will have an opportunity to explore educational and career pathways that match their interest and skills.

On a final note, more of the city's tech companies should be participating in the city's Summer Youth Employment Program. If we're serious about building a more inclusive local economy and getting employers to develop talent pipelines from underrepresented communities, that seems like a good place to start.

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