American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

HBCU alumnae blaze trails at American

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Building a career in industries like IT and engineering, which have been historically male-dominated, has been challenging for women — especially women of color. Despite more recent gains, Black women continue to be underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers. Committed to **meaningful change**, American is proud of its team members who are helping break down barriers. In honor of Women's History Month, we recognize four outstanding historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) alumnae who are charting their own course and helping open doors for others.

ERIKA LACOUR-LOYD

graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from Prairie View A&M University. She then went on to earn an MBA from the University of Dallas.

What's your job at American?

While I'm an engineer by trade, my job title is senior manager of Maintenance programs. I lead a team that develops the engineering work orders needed to maintain all of American's aircraft. What we do underpins safety for our customers and team members.

Why did you choose a career in engineering?

Coming from a family of engineers, I was surrounded by the industry and engineering-speak right from the start. My favorite subjects in school were science and math, and as I grew older I became fascinated with figuring out how things work, by taking them apart and putting them back together again.

What challenges have you come across as a Black woman working in engineering?

Simply not having many colleagues who were Black women was a challenge, especially when I joined American 23

years ago. There were very few people with a similar journey that I could look up to. But being one of the first means you're on the leading edge of change.

Sharing my journey helps promote the profession amongst minority groups and goes a long way toward attracting diverse applicants to American's co-op program and full-time positions. This is both fulfilling and rewarding.

What would you say to young Black women who aspire to become an engineer?
Take time to explore the different fields in the sector, take advantage of educational opportunities and seek out someone who you aspire to be like to help mentor you along the way.

"Recognize that with your diversity comes strength. The times are quickly changing. It sounds cliché, but the world really is your oyster."
CERI GOFF

is a graduate of Florida A&M University. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science.
What's your job at American?
I work as an associate developer on the Engineering Excellence team. Our team provides developers with products that increase the efficiency of the work they do, which helps bring about technological advances that improve the customer's journey.

Why did you choose a career in IT?
My father, who was a developer, introduced me to the exciting world of tech when I was eight years old. I was fascinated by the way tech provides solutions to so many big problems. Excelling in STEM subjects through school also led me toward IT. But what really motivated me was the lack of women in the field: I was drawn to the challenge of exemplifying excellence amongst my male counterparts.

What challenges have you come across as a Black woman in the world of IT?
Until I joined American, I did not have many colleagues who looked like me, and that presents a challenge for anyone.

American's focus on diversity, and even the diversity of my own team — having a female boss and several colleagues who are Black women — allows me and others to feel comfortable bringing our whole selves to work.

What would you say to young Black women who aspire to pursue a career in IT?

You have the power to overcome any obstacle that happens to be in your way or intentionally tries to stop you.

Stop thinking of it as fitting in. It’s molding the space into one that fits you, because it’s the you the company wants.
Always remember where you came from and help those after you.
You belong in the IT profession.
"Stop thinking of it as fitting in. It’s molding the space into one that fits you, because it’s the you the company wants."

CANDACE JOHNSON

is a graduate of Southern University and A&M College. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering.
What’s your job at American?
As a senior Compliance specialist, my job is to help ensure the work American’s team of engineers does meets the airline’s high standards and those of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). We are the point of liaison with the FAA, and our No. 1 goal is to guarantee safety.

Why did you choose a career in engineering?
Engineering is a great profession for people who like to solve problems and make an impact — that’s me. The support I received growing up, from my family and the community, made me feel comfortable choosing a path that was not female oriented.

What challenges have you come across as a Black woman working in engineering?
At the start of my career, one of the first challenges I experienced was having to prove I knew what I was doing and that I can be trained to learn anything. This was helped by finding mentors, advocates and sponsors.

The barriers have become far fewer since those early days. Recruiting students at the National Society of Black Engineers annual conference and direct from HBCUs has helped bring about change and is something I am honored to have been part of.

What would you say to young Black women who aspire to pursue a career in engineering?
Women in STEM are needed. We can help shape the world. Always stay close to your passion; it will get you through those hard classes in college and the challenges you come across in your career. And most importantly, continue to give back to other women — reach one, teach one.

"And most importantly, continue to give back to other women — reach one, teach one."

BRIANNA BOWEN

is a graduate of Florida A&M University. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science.

What's your job at American?
I am an associate developer in the Ticketing and Receipts team. The work we do makes the booking experience easier, helping to improve the experience customers have when flying with American.

Why did you choose a career in IT?
Growing up, I was always fascinated by technology and the things it could do, but it wasn't until I was older that I realized I could have a career that allowed me to create technology. I started college as a business administration major, but it wasn't for me, so I took a leap of faith and changed my major to computer science. Needless to say — I have not looked back.

What challenges have you come across as a Black woman in the world of IT?
Not being heard is sometimes a challenge. I can recall situations where I've been troubleshooting something with a group and tried to voice a possible solution, only to have my idea spoken over. It's unfortunate that things like this happen, but I just remind myself that no matter how anyone treats me, at the end of the day I know that I deserve to be in this field just as much as the next person.

It feels good to be part of the work American is doing to help bring about a more just and equal society. As part of the 2020 intake for the American Airlines Development Program for Technology (ADEPT) — a rotational program we have for recent IT college graduates — I am helping recruit the incoming 2021 class of ADEPTs. It is a great experience to be able to help candidates, some of them from HBCUs, like myself, feel more comfortable during the interview process.

What would you say to young Black women who aspire to pursue a career in IT?
If you want it and if you put in the hard work, you can do it. I can't promise that it will be an easy journey, but if you're passionate and dedicated, anything is possible. Just remember that confidence in yourself and your abilities is key, and that your knowledge is something that no one can take from you.

"If you want it and if you put in the hard work, you can do it."