



AEA Dialogue on Race and Class in America San Antonio Discussion Scenarioⁱ

The Scenario

It is a great day in San Antonio, Texas! Samantha James, a home-grown entrepreneurial superstar, has just announced the opening of the first new branch of her successful tech company, right in downtown San Antonio! Everybody in town is buzzing with the news. The announcement board on the Central High School front lawn virtually shouts in all capital letters, THANK YOU SAM! The downtown San Fernando Cathedral announcement board similarly proclaims, BLESS YOU SAM! And Mi Tierra restaurant is crowded with San Antonio residents, all speculating about the resurrection of the city, thanks to the good heartedness of one of their own, Sam. In San Antonio, Samantha Annamarie James, founder and CEO of Silicon Valley tech company StoreIt, is just plain 'Sam'. And in San Antonio, like nowhere else, Sam still feels truly at home.

The StoreIt company is tiny, compared to the behemoths of Yahoo, Microsoft, Google, and the like. But, compared to all the technology companies that have started up and succeeded in the last 25 years, StoreIt is a small-to-medium sized company with a sterling reputation. StoreIt's technology niche is the development of a small piece of programmed electronic hardware that can be inserted into any electronic device and that, with the press of two buttons (*Z), enables instant cloud storage of text, photos, music, and most other items on the user's account. This invention both saves space on the device, enabling it to run more efficiently and for longer periods of time, and keeps the user's collection of digital information safe for easy future access.

The city of San Antonio is still suffering from the 2008 recession despite growing employment opportunities thanks to concerted efforts by both city government and a consortium of private and public service employers such as SA Works, Workforce Solutions Alamo, and the Alamo College system. Unemployment remains around 4.2 percent. Underemployment is around 4.1 percent. So, the prospect of a new business in town, especially a fancy hi-tech business, has city leaders and many residents giddy with anticipation.

During a recent personal visit, Sam announced that the San Antonio branch of StoreIt will be open for business in eight months. And further, training programs for StoreIt jobs will begin in San Antonio, as well as virtually, in three months' time. At the outset, StoreIt-San Antonio will employ three groups of workers: (1) the sign-up team, who have the job of actively recruiting new customers; (2) the customer service team, who provide an ear and expertise to current customers with questions or complaints; and (3) the idea team, who have the job of "percolating ideas with abandon", ideas for improving or expanding or redirecting the company's vision and creative responses to emerging and dynamic markets. Future teams will be added, as StoreIt adapts to the Texas context. So, no manufacturing jobs will be coming to San Antonio, because the plant in California can readily handle an expansion of the business. Rather, the jobs that are coming are jobs requiring experience and/or training. And that training is being promised to all who wish to attend.

Further, Sam has already established a local advisory group on education and training for the StoreIt jobs that are coming to San Antonio. This group includes K-12 and higher education experts in both the content and pedagogy of new technologies, representatives of the city government and business sectors, and citizens nominated by others. StoreIt training is expected to take multiple forms and to be offered in multiple venues.

A Snapshot of San Antonio

The city of San Antonio is in South/Central Texas with top workforce demands in the areas of technology, healthcare, and mid-skilled workers for advanced manufacturing.

The demographic portrait of San Antonio is unique in that it is the seventh largest city in the US with a population of 1.86 million as of 2014, and has evolved in recent decades to a majority minority city:

50% minority (7.1% African American, 59.3% Latino/a, and .2% Native American and 4.3% other), 29% white, 86.8% are native born citizens, 5.2% naturalized citizens, and 7.9% non-citizens. Economically, while 18.4% of the total population live below the federal poverty level, a disproportionate number (72.2%) of Latinos in San Antonio are considered "poor", with incomes below the poverty line.

Two issues of currency in urban areas throughout the US are indeed present in San Antonio today, although without the drama and news hype common in other cities.

One, health and economic disparities continue to create conditions that adversely affect the everyday lives of persons in San Antonio. Access to care, affordable and available healthy food choices, and the built environment contribute to poor health outcomes for much of the community.

Two, redlining policies akin to Jim Crow influenced the creation of 18 fragmented school districts within San Antonio that has left a legacy of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic segregation that continues to define the city. In addition, families with financial resources opt to enroll their children in the robust, private Catholic school system, further establishing a line of demarcation between the have and the have-nots.

- 61% increase in homicides from 2015 to 2016
- 55.5% increase in violent crime from 2015 to 2016
- Life expectancy differs more than 20 years from affluent to lower SES zip codes
- Dramatic health disparities between north and south sectors of the city

Whither evaluation?

SAISD's Superintendent of Schools, Pedro Martinez, has proposed that the training programs offered to San Antonio residents as preparation for working for StoreIt be evaluated throughout the program design and implementation process. Dr. Martinez is a fervent advocate for evaluation, as he has witnessed first-hand its important contributions to new educational program initiatives. Dr. Martinez, and supporters within the San Antonio school system, are currently recommending to the local advisory board established by Sam that StoreIt include funding for evaluation in their training proposal and budget.

ⁱ This scenario was originally penned by Jennifer Greene and modified to fit San Antonio by Andrea Guajardo.