

Working for/against Big Tech

How do we evaluate our individual actions in terms of the organizational and structural change we would like to see?

Disclaimers

- We're students with student perspectives.
- We're also confused and wanna talk it out.
- Everyone has a different set of circumstances.
- We're providing some starting thoughts, let us know your thoughts too.
- This may be reductive, but it's definitely more complicated than this.
- WE HAVE NO SOLUTIONS, just... suggestions





Let's say you've got an offer from a
Big Tech company...

Should you take it?

The questionable things Big Tech do



The tech industry is forcing gentrification in major US cities- what can we do to fix this?

Techies have recreated areas in their own image, driving out the locals and their culture.

By [Robin Zabiegalski](#) May 1, 2017

PETER THIEL'S PALANTIR WAS USED TO BUST RELATIVES OF MIGRANT CHILDREN, NEW DOCUMENTS SHOW

Palantir previously claimed its software was strictly involved in criminal investigations as opposed to deportations. This was false.

[Sam Biddle](#), [Ryan Devereaux](#)

May 2 2019, 5:15 p.m.

Facebook Knows It Was Used To Help Incite The Capitol Insurrection

The questionable things Big Tech do



Amazon's Ring now reportedly partners with more than 2,000 US police and fire departments

Only two states— Montana and Wyoming— have no departments on the Ring program

By [Kim Lyons](#) | Jan 31, 2021, 11:26am EST

The tech industry is forcing re-certification in major

Amazon is the invisible backbone of ICE's immigration crackdown

Lobbying dollars and a cozy relationship with the government have given the tech giant an outsized influence in the Department of Homeland Security.

by Karen Hao

Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach

TECH

How Amazon is fighting back against workers' increasing efforts to unionize

By Kim Lyons | Jan 31, 2021, 11:26am EST

Facebook Knows It Was Used To PALANTIR PLAYED KEY ROLE IN ARRESTING FAMILIES FOR DEPORTATION, DOCUMENT SHOWS

ALEX HANNA

MEREDITH WHITTAKER

IDEAS 12.31.2020 07:00 AM

Timnit Gebru's Exit From Google Exposes a Crisis in AI

Facial recognition leads to first wrongful U.S. arrest, activists say

By Robin Zab

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The two-year fight to stop Amazon from selling face recognition to the police

This week's moves from Amazon, Microsoft, and IBM mark a major milestone for researchers and civil rights advocates in a long and ongoing fight over face recognition in law enforcement.

by **Karen Hao**

June 12, 2020

Palantir previously claimed its software was strictly involved in criminal justice, not immigration. It was strictly opposed to deportations. This was false.

TECHNOLOGY

After Data Breach Exposes 530 Million, Facebook Says It Will Not Notify Users

Facebook Knows It Was Used To

How PALANTIR PLAYED KEY ROLE IN ARRESTING FAMILIES FOR DEPORTATION. DOCUMENT

The New York Times

Clearview AI's Facial Recognition App

Called Illegal in Canada

The tech industry is forcing gentrification in

Facebook failed to fix ad-targeting gender discrimination, study finds

By **Kyle Wiggers** @Kyle_L_Wiggers April 9, 2021 5:00 AM

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Big Tech is pushing states to pass privacy laws, and yes, you should be suspicious

TECH

Amazon is fighting back against

Facebook approves alcohol, vaping, gambling and dating ads targeting teens, lobby group finds

By national education and parenting reporter **Conor Duffy**

Posted 4d ago, updated 4d ago

Antitrust pressure on Big Tech takes center stage in Congress

Google Exposes a Crisis in AI

Reasons to work for Big Tech

- High salary and stock benefits (especially attractive post-grad)
- Job stability (visa sponsorship) & social benefits (health insurance, days off)
- Comfortable work environment
- Interesting problems and computing power
- Clout
- “If you care about the harms of Big Tech, be the inner good”
- “If you don’t take the job, someone who’s not as socially inclined as you are might take it. You could do it better and have access to more resources.”
 - Short-term implications

Go in and change things?

- Individual vs. collective action
 - Tbh, you alone can't do much, and your view of what's "good" isn't necessarily true
 - You may be expendable (and so are your walk-out friends, see Timnit Gebru)
 - Capacity to disrupt (walk-outs, strikes) but little political power
- Your work might be performative/damage control, not structural change
 - Performative ethics
 - Propping up existing systems
 - Band-aid over bullet wound



Reasons to not take the job

- Talent needed to work for structural change and mitigating harms in a way that doesn't support them.
- Imagining and developing alternatives to Big Tech and their products
 - Might cause more harm than good if wielding "tech solutions"
- Enough people doing this could break the tech talent pipeline and bring about organizational change - #NoTechForICE
 - Sadly, there's lack of similar movements against other companies + people who don't care / won't care



Suggestions

- Look beyond the sensationalist harms of Big Tech
- The line between “Big Tech” and other tech companies and big corporations are fuzzy.
- People taking jobs in Big Tech should not ignore their harms and the harms workers themselves prop up and perpetuate
- For undergrads, it’s easy to see short-term benefits. Should also think long-term and consider your actions within a collective scope



What are the alternatives? (a growing field!)

- Software engineer, PM, Design
 - Civic minded tech companies - Mozilla, Brave
 - GovTech - Coding it Forward Fellowships
- Tech policy
 - Upturn, Algorithmic Justice League, Data for Black Lives, AI Now Institute, EFF, EPIC, + many more
- Academia
 - Princeton's CITP, similar centers at Harvard, Berkeley, MIT, NYU, etc.
- Educators, Artists, Activists
- Job boards for public interest technology (PIT)
 - <https://public-interest-tech.com/#non-governmental-organizations>



Closing points

- Not a monolithic decision, conflicts will repeat.
- Keep thinking, stay engaged with issues, and act in response to them!
- If you want to learn more about alternative paths, drop something in chat!

