

# #DoodleUs: Gender & Race in Google Doodles



## SPARK Movement

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## INTRODUCTION

We're excited to be launching #DoodleUs, an in-depth exploration of the representation of women and people of color in Google Doodles. Collecting this data has taken many months of research, lots of teamwork, and several moments where we were forced to negotiate what, exactly, our ultimate goals were. Because this is such a detail- and data-rich project, we want to be transparent about our process, our decisions, and areas that other activists and researchers might take up next.

Even with all the questions and uncertainty we uncovered in this project, we found one thing for certain: an utter lack of any sort of diversity. As the data in this report shows, 2010, 2011, and 2012 all saw zero women of color honored in Google's Global Doodles. Out of the 445 total Doodles Google created to honor people between the years of 2010 and 2013, a full 74% honored white people. Only 17% honored women of any race. An even more abysmal 4.3% honored women of color.

We want to be transparent with our data and process because we want Google to be transparent with theirs. We want Google to be transparent about the fact that since the beginning of the Doodles' existence, they have been promoting white men's achievements as the standard for their homepage, and we want them to be transparent about what they are doing to fix that.

## METHOD

Google Doodles have been celebrating historical individuals since 2001, and while the designs have come a long way, the white male-centric focus really hasn't. Though we did look at all the Doodles since the beginning, we focused particularly on those created between 2010 and 2013. Using Google's Doodle database at [www.google.com/doodles](http://www.google.com/doodles), we tracked Doodles celebrating individuals, but not holidays or festivals named for people (such as St. George's Day or the festival of San Sebastian). We DID include Martin Luther King Jr. Day—a doodle that recurs every year in the United States. We didn't count animated characters, fictional characters, or anthropomorphic animals (even when the furry lil friends were gendered). In short, we focused on Doodles that celebrated the achievements of real people.

We researched the people honored with Google Doodles between 2010 and 2013 and collected the following information:

- a. The person's race, gender, and geographic location in the world
- b. What parts of the world the Doodle appeared in (global vs regional)
- c. What the person achieved in their lifetime

We are working with two sets of data:

**Global Doodles** are Doodles that are visible on every Google homepage across the world, regardless of country or region. There were 89 global Doodles between 2010 and 2013.

**Total Doodles** are every Doodle of a person published from 2010-2013 across all regions and countries. It includes both Global Doodles *and* regional Doodles (Doodles only visible in certain countries and regions). There were 445 total Doodles honoring people between 2010 and 2013.

## ON RACE AND CATEGORIZATION

Even before we started this project, we knew that because race is a social construct, it would be tricky to determine race for some of the people featured in Doodles. We expected some challenges, but soon found that it was even more complicated than we thought and that oftentimes it was utterly impossible to “label” people without knowing how they identify.

We initially categorized everyone as either white or people of color (POC), but very quickly found the flaws in such a binary. First, declaring that individuals are either white or people of color sets whiteness as the default and implies that everyone else deviates from this standard. Such a simple binary also ignores the enormous diversity within those labeled “people of color,” since the term can apply to millions of people around the world and therefore encompasses very different histories and lived experiences.

Since SPARK consists of mostly North Americans, our notions of what constitutes whiteness and what it means to be a person of color are limited in scope. For example, much of how the U.S. perceives race has to do with skin color and physical appearance, so we instinctively resorted to pictures (in combination with other background information) in order to determine a person’s race. However, there were several times when we looked at someone’s photograph, history, and geographic location and could not confidently or in good conscience bestow a label on them. We fully acknowledge that we are working within a flawed framework.

In cases that left us conflicted, we left the individual’s race “uncertain.” The vast majority of the people whose race we felt uncertain about were men from Latin America. For the sake of transparency, here are the 15 people who we left “uncertain”:

Monteiro Lobato; Khalil Gibran; Tarsila do Amaral; Miriam Ruth; Quinquela Martín; Marcela Paz; Heitor Villa-Lobos; Rubén Darío; Olga Ferri; Ary Barroso; Pedro Nel Gómez; Manuel Alvarez Bravo; Saturnino Herrán; Agustin Lara; Maria Callas.

There were, however, cases like Mexican actress Consuelo Velazquez, whom we initially marked “uncertain” because her photographs read ambiguously in terms of race. Later, we made the decision that Google probably considered her a woman of color while designing her Doodle, so we changed the label.

Even while keeping in mind the pitfalls and challenges of a white/POC binary, we maintained this method of analysis for several reasons. Firstly, because as an American company, it is very likely that Google approaches Doodles with this binary in mind, albeit unconsciously. In addition, despite the uncertainty of racial identity, we were still able to determine that **Google Doodles overwhelmingly honor people who are unambiguously white.**

Secondly, we maintained the system of racial classification because we needed to reflect the racial realities of the society in which Google Doodles exist. It was difficult and uncomfortable to categorize

individuals and try to define the boundaries between races, but the alternative would have meant leaving race out of our analysis altogether, which would have meant vastly simplified results that did not fully explore the lack of representation in the Doodles.

We at times attempted to understand how an individual would identify or be classified within their homeland as a way of being more “objective,” but such an undertaking is extremely complicated, and we could not afford to do it for every one of the 445 individuals we analyzed. Most importantly, we came to realize that regardless of location, no system of racial classification is better or more accurate than another. Systems of classification will always be based on social constructs that have blurred boundaries and minimal logic.

We also have some incomplete (for various reasons both resource-related and having to do with all of the limits outlined above) data about who was represented within the category of “POC”—for example, the two women of color who were honored with Global Doodles in 2013 were black; from 2010-2013 there were **no** Global Doodles honoring (for example) Asian, Latina, or Indigenous women. This data is not included in this report, but it is a potential avenue of exploration for activists and researchers, and we welcome inquiries from interested parties who may want to build on our research.

## **REGIONS**

In an attempt to counteract the problems of ambiguity and subjectivity that come up when trying to categorize people by race, we decided to also differentiate by region. We expected regions to be a more objective form of analyzing identity, but later found that this method is also not as clear-cut as expected. For example, Egypt is sometimes considered part of the Middle East but also part of Northern Africa. Same with Turkey: is it part of Europe or the Middle East? In cases like these we labeled the countries as both. This is why our data shows a considerable number of people represented from the Middle East--most of them are from either Turkey or Egypt.

Mexico was also a tricky region to determine. While Mexico is certainly part of the North American landmass, the U.S. views Mexico as racially and culturally Other, and references to North America tend to ignore everything below the U.S. Because of this reasons, and because we felt it likely that Google itself also approached Mexican doodles from this viewpoint, we decided not to use South America as a regional category. We used Latin America instead so that we did not have to include Mexico and Central American countries in a region that often excludes them, leaving North America to the U.S. and Canada.

The ambiguity of regional boundaries also raises questions of mobility and immigration. Most of the immigrants represented in Google Doodles were European immigrants to the United States, with very few Latin American immigrants. We wanted to acknowledge that people often have multiple national identities, so we counted several people as being from more than one place. Because we considered that one person could represent more than one region, our numbers for each individual region are somewhat inflated.

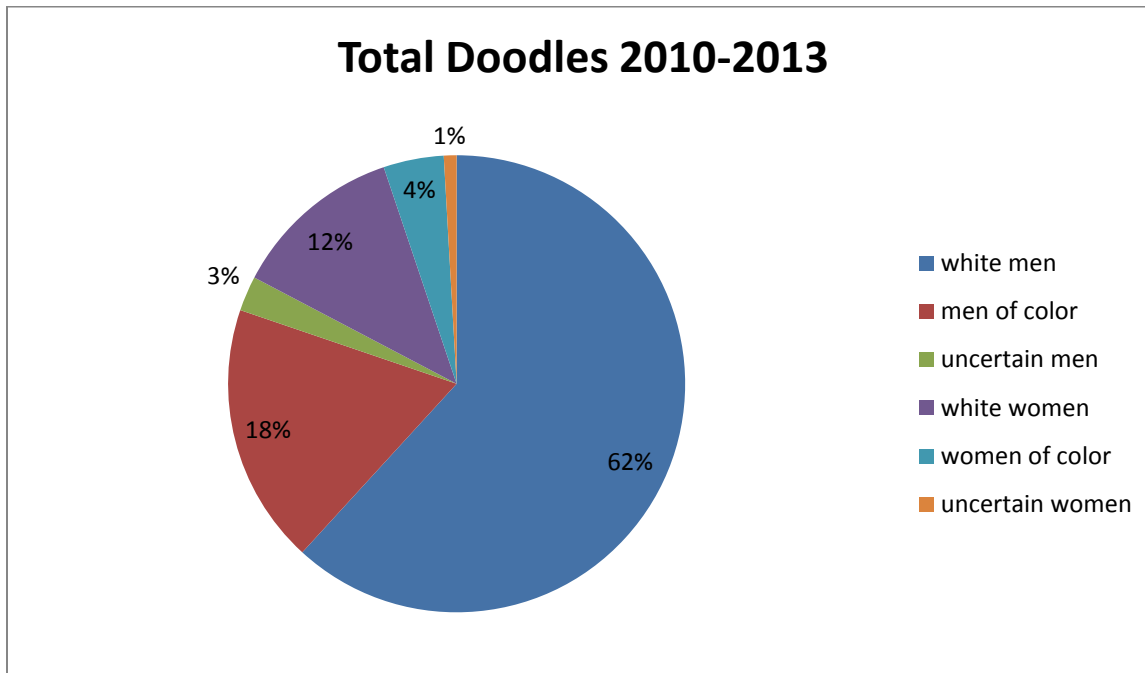
## SECTION ONE: ALL DOODLES 2010-2013

In total, there were 445 **total Doodles** honoring individuals published between 2010 and 2013. Figure 1.1 shows the raw collective data for that time period, while figure 1.2 shows that same data percentage-wise.

**TOTAL DOODLES 2010-2013 (figure 1.1):**

	Total doodles	White	People of Color	Uncertain
men	<b>368</b>	275	82	11
women	<b>77</b>	54	19	4
total	<b>445</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>15</b>

**Figure 1.2:**

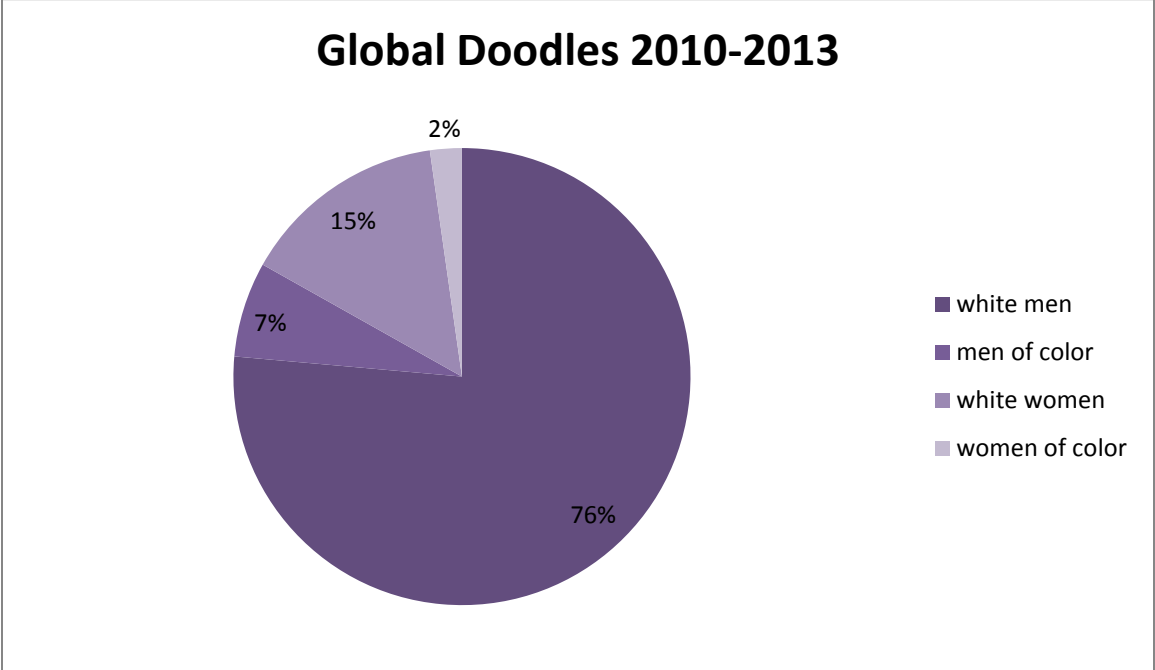


There were 89 **global Doodles** honoring individuals published between 2010 and 2013. Figure 1.3 shows the raw data for that time period, while figure 1.4 shows that same data percentage-wise.

**GLOBAL DOODLES 2010-2013 (Figure 1.3):**

	Total doodles	white	People of Color
men	<b>74</b>	68	6
women	<b>15</b>	13	2
total	<b>89</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>8</b>

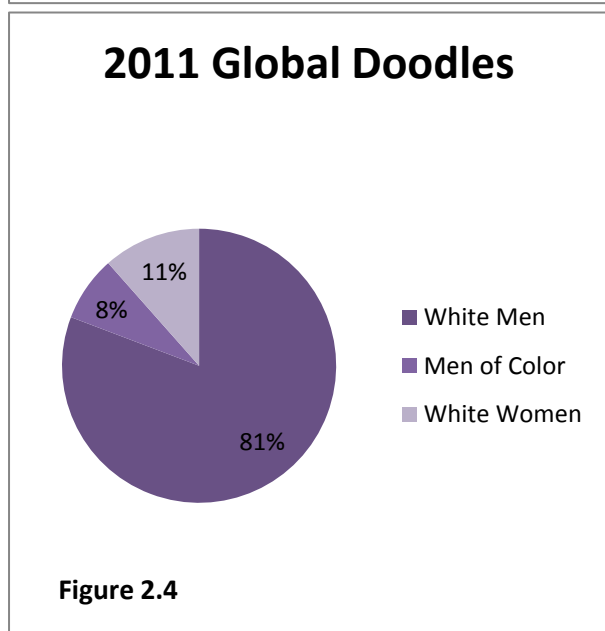
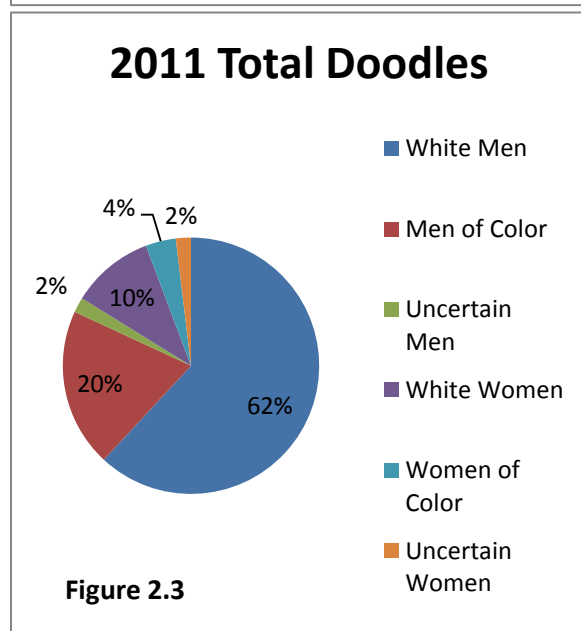
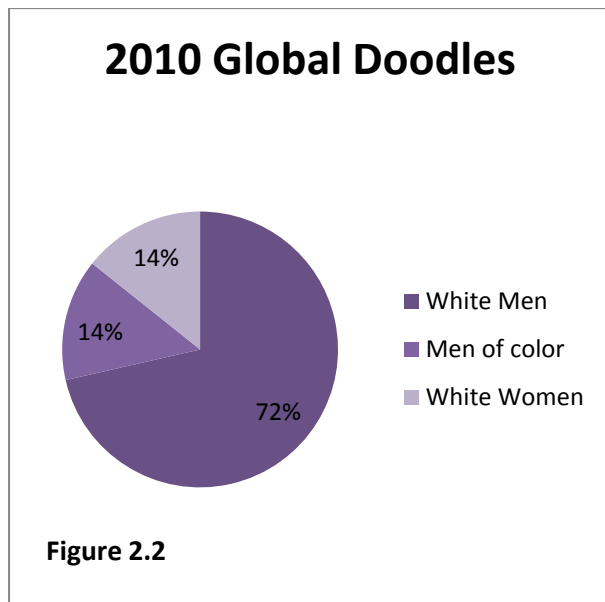
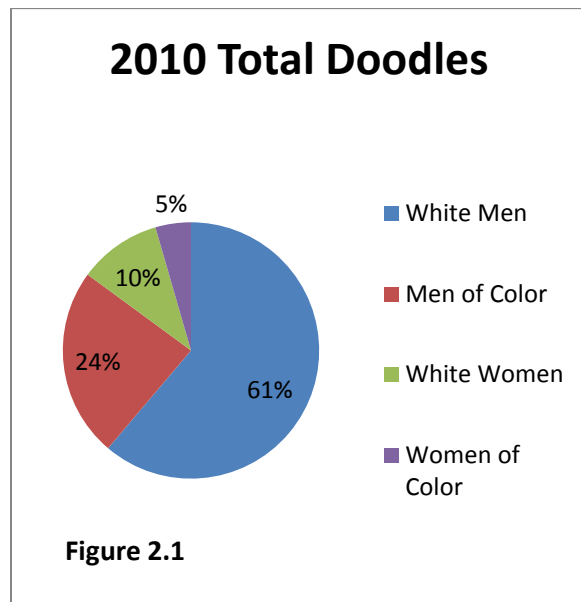
Figure 1.4:



## SECTION TWO: DOODLES YEAR BY YEAR

This section looks at the race & gender ratios in Total and Global Doodles for the individual years 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 (figs 2.1-2.8). Figures 2.10 and 2.11 show all 4 years in comparison to one another across race and gender. These figures show that while some numbers have been improving, the overall disparity in honoring the achievements of women and of men of color in comparison to white men is still very large.

Please also note that in figures 2.2., 2.4, and 2.6, there are **no women of color**. No women of color were honored with Global Doodles until 2013 (fig 2.8).





### 2012 Total Doodles

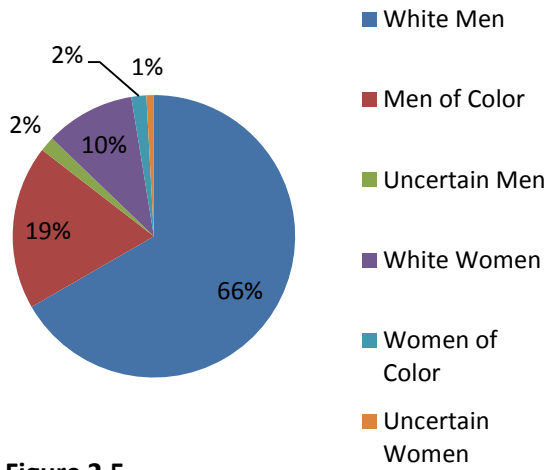


Figure 2.5

### 2012 Global Doodles

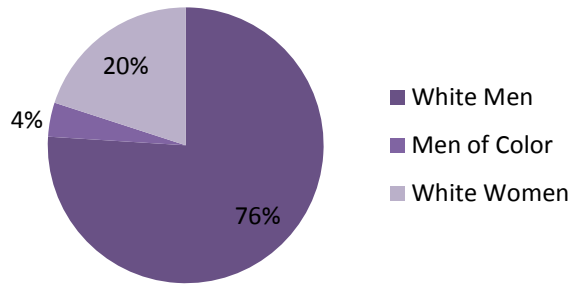


Figure 2.6

### 2013 Total Doodles

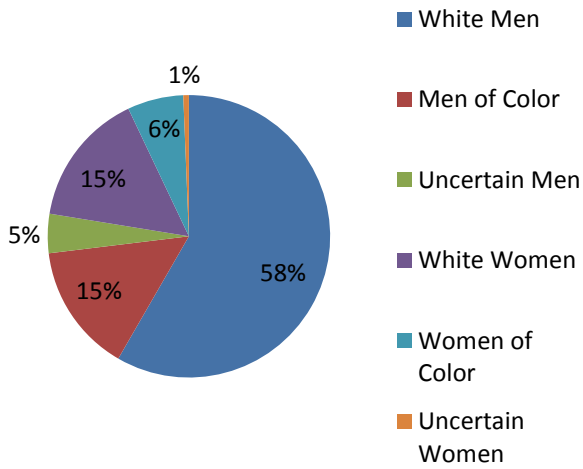


Figure 2.7

### 2013 Global Doodles

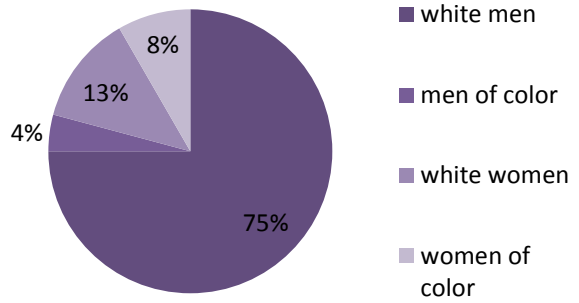


Figure 2.8

Figure 2.10

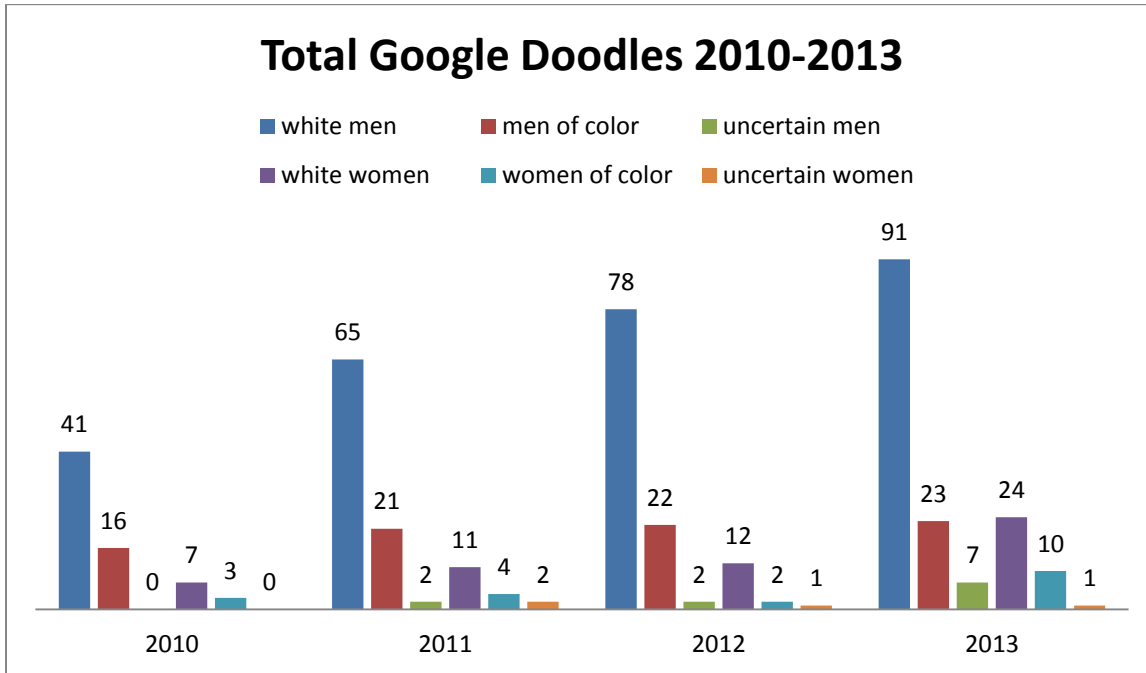
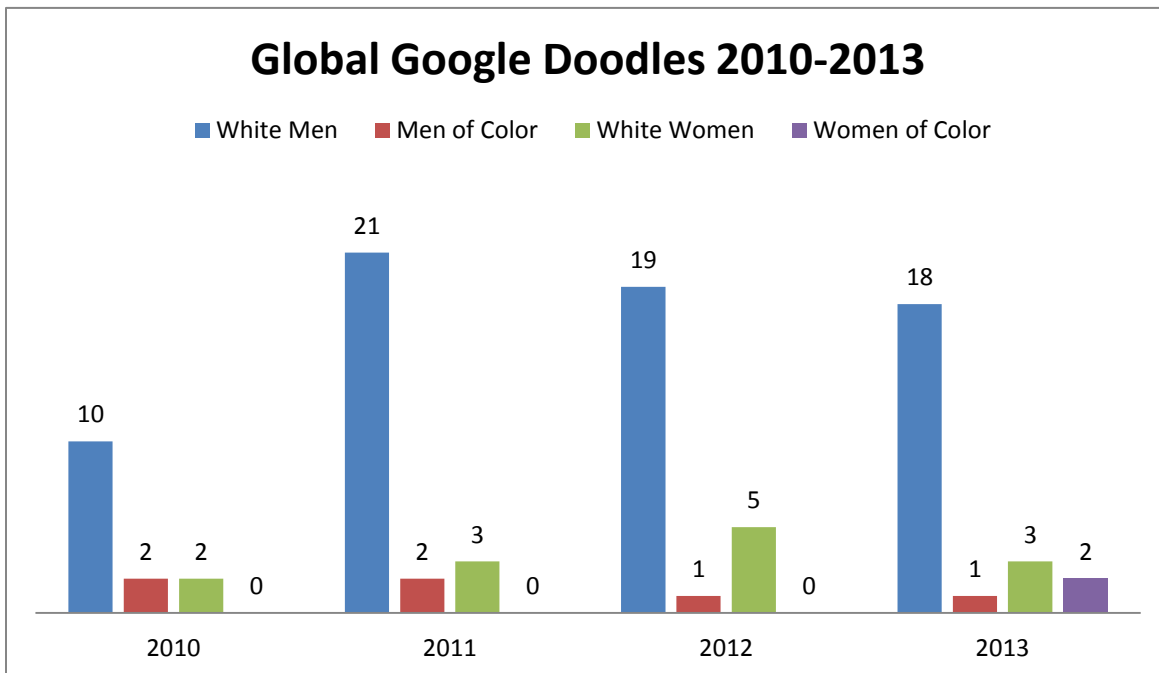
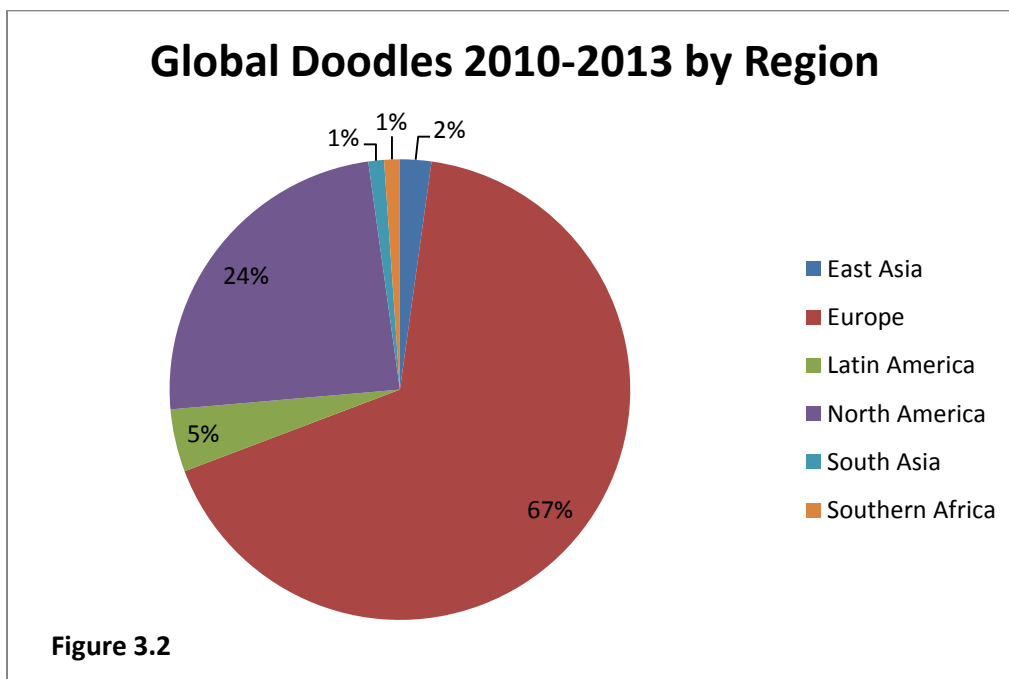
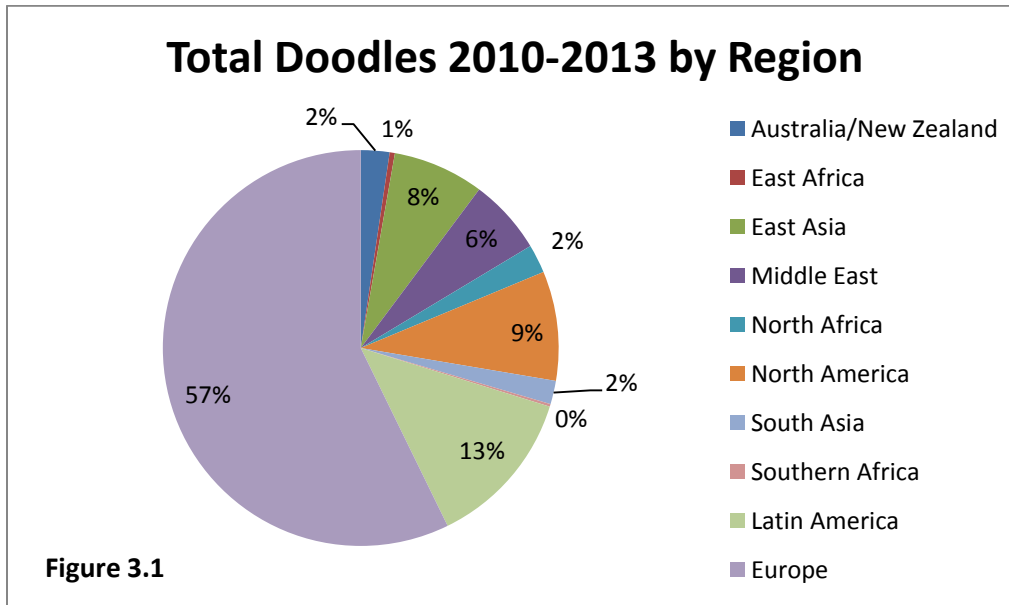


Figure 2.11



## SECTION THREE: DOODLES BY REGION

This section looks at the regions of the world where people celebrated in Doodles come from. As discussed earlier, these numbers are both broad strokes and slightly inflated. Even still, it's clear that Europe is represented much more than any other region. This is especially true in the Global Doodles—regional Doodles tend to feature people who come from those regions, but Global doodles are seen *everywhere*, and are overwhelmingly European, which sends a clear message about whose history is “worth” learning about globally.



## CONCLUSION AND FURTHER ACTION

While this report and our related #DoodleUs action focus explicitly on Google Doodles, this problem of representation and celebration goes far beyond Google. The way we teach and learn history is overwhelmingly whitewashed, focusing on the efforts and contributions of white men at the expense of everyone else. We are presenting this data and asking Google to make a conscious, public effort to improve not because we think Google Doodles are bad and wrong, but because we think Google Doodles are a great, fun way of learning history, and that Google has an opportunity to influence the way current and future generations think about the world we live in.

We invite you take action with us in the following ways:

- Ask Google directly to improve these numbers by signing on with us at [www.change.org/DoodleUs](http://www.change.org/DoodleUs)
- Learn more about the history of this action and SPARK at [www.sparkmovement.org/DoodleUs](http://www.sparkmovement.org/DoodleUs)
- See more research on Doodles & gender dating back to 2001 from Ann M. Martin at <http://speakingupforus.wordpress.com>
- Share what you've learned on social media using the hashtag #DoodleUs
- Learn more about historical women and people of color who Google might celebrate by visiting our Tumblr, <http://GoogleDoodleUs.tumblr.com>
- Do research in your own community about who is represented. Are the monuments, street signs, parks, buildings, and bridges mostly dedicated to white men? Is there anything you can do to change that? Share your research and your action with us at [doodles@sparksummit.com](mailto:doodles@sparksummit.com)